

S E R M O N S 30

PREACHED AT

2.L.e.

L I N C O L N ' S - I N N ,

Between the Years 1765 and 1776.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

By RICHARD HURD, D. D.

Lord Bishop of LICHFIELD and COVENTRY.

and late Preacher of LINCOLN'S-INN.

L O N D O N ,

PRINTED BY J. NICHOLS:

FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND,

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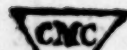
S E R M O N S

PRINTED AT

LINCOLN

Between the years 1794 and 1795

VOLUME SECOND



**MUSEUM
BRITANNICUM**

RICHARD D. D.

last thing of the kind and country

and the people of London

L O N D O N

PRINTED BY J. WILKINS

FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND

1795

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

Preached April 27, 1766.

St. MARK, iv. 24.

Take heed what ye hear.

Or, as the equivalent phrase is in

St. LUKE, viii. 18,

Take heed HOW ye hear. p. 1.

S E R M O N II.

Preached Nov. 24, 1765.

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*I would have you wise unto that which is good,
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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Sermons, contained in the two following volumes, and in the former one, were prepared for the use of the Society of Lincoln's Inn, and delivered by the author in their Chapel, during the course of eleven years, while he had the honour of being their Preacher.

Upon his resignation of that office in 1776, the Masters of the Bench were pleased, in the most obliging manner, to make it their request to him, that they might be printed and published.

To THEM, therefore, and the other members of that truly honourable Society, in acknowledgment of their many and great favours, These Volumes are, with the most sincere and grateful respect, INSCRIBED and DEDICATED.

R. LICHF. & COV.

S E R M O N I.

Preached April 27, 1766.

St. MARK, iv. 24.

Take heed what ye hear.

Or, as the equivalent phrase is in

St. LUKE, viii. 18.

Take heed HOW ye hear.

FAITH, says the Apostle, *cometh by bearing, and bearing by the word of God*^a. The assertion was strictly true in the early days of the Gospel, before books were yet written and spread abroad for the edification of the church. The inlet of faith was, then, the *ear*: through that organ only was conveyed, from the tongue of the preacher, *the word of God*. But the case

^a Rom. x. 17.

is much the same at all times; even *now*, when books are enough multiplied, and perhaps more than enough, in the Christian world. For, it having pleased God, that a standing ministry should be kept up for the instruction of mankind in *the faith*, and a *woe* being denounced against such, as have received this commission, and yet *preach not the Gospel* ^b, the *sole* way by which *faith* cometh to most men, and the *principal*, by which it cometh to almost all, is still that of *bearing*. It is still by the *word preached*, that men, in general, come to the faith of Christ, and are confirmed in the profession of it.

Our Lord, then, foreseeing how much would depend on this faculty of *bearing*, and finding by experience how liable it was to be abused, thought fit to give his Disciples a particular, and what may almost seem a *new*, precept, for their conduct in this respect. The antient masters of rhetoric, and of morals, had frequently warned their scholars

^b 1 Cor. ix. 16.

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to take heed what *they speak*: but our Divine Master carries his attention still farther; and while his ministers are required, *to speak, as the oracles of God*, the people are very properly instructed by him, *to take heed what they hear*.

Now, that this admonition may have its full effect, it will be proper to explain the reasons, on which it is founded; to lay before you the several considerations which shew of what infinite concern it is to those, who *hear* the word, to be *attentive* in hearing.

And it naturally occurs, as the

I. FIRST reason for this attention, that what is spoken, is delivered to them, *as the word of God*.

When a person in high place and authority thinks fit to honour us with a message, though it be in a matter of no great importance, with what submission is it received? How diligently do we listen to it? How circumspectly is every sentence, and even syllable weighed? We do not stand to make

B 2

exceptions

exceptions to the messenger, who may have nothing in his own *person* to command our respect; we do not much consider the *grace* with which he delivers his message; we are not curious to observe in what *choice* or *elegant* terms it is expressed. We are only concerned to know, that the message has been faithfully related, and then a due regard is immediately paid to it. And shall God speak to us by the mouth of his ministers, in terms which himself dictates, and which we may verify, if we please, by comparing them with his own *written word*, shall, I say, the God of Heaven thus address himself to us, and we not *take heed what and how we hear*?

Or, suppose the opinion of a man learned in any secular profession is reported to us, on a point which falls within his province, and of which it concerns us to form a right apprehension, Is not such *opinion* received with respect by us, and studied with care?

And shall our Divine Master be negligently *beared*, when he condescends to instruct

us.

us in the way of life and salvation, a subject, of all others, the most interesting to us; a subject, which he alone perfectly understands, and concerning which he will not and cannot mislead us?

Still further, besides the authority of the divine word, there is something in the *nature* of it, which deserves, and, if we be not wholly insensible, must command our attention.

For shall a little superficial rhetorick be listened to with regard, perhaps with admiration? And shall not the heart-felt truths of the Gospel warm and affect us? Shall a few spiritless periods, ranged in measure, and coloured with art, mere sound and paint, throw an assembly, sometimes, into joy or grief, or transport it with indignation? And can we lend a careless ear to the word of God, *which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spi-*

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rit, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart ^c?

Such is the attention due to the word of God, when *acknowledged* under that character. But

II. A SECOND reason for *bearing* with caution, is, that the hearers are required to judge for themselves whether what is delivered to them be, *indeed*, the word of God. Without this care, impostures may be endless, and the effect of them fatal.

When we give up ourselves with an implicit trust to others in mere temporal concerns, the mischief, although considerable, may yet be checked by experience; or, at most, as it respects this life only, is not conclusive and irreparable: but in matters of religion, if we accept *that* as the word of God, and act upon it, which has no higher authority than the word of fallible and presumptuous men, we may be led into all the visions of fanaticism or superstition, and into all the crimes which so naturally

^c Heb. iv. 12.

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spring from both, to the loss of our future, as well as present happiness.

It pleased God, therefore, from the time that miracles ceased to be the credentials of his ministers in the Christian Church, to secure the faithful from these dangers by the guidance of the *written Word*; in which, besides *special rules* there given for the trial of *the spirits, whether they are of God*, such *general principles* are delivered as may direct our judgment. And by the help of these, interpreted by the *tenor* of that word, and the *analogy* of faith, we may be secured from all deception or surprize.

It is true, all men cannot *apply* these rules and principles, or not with full knowledge and effect. Woe, therefore, be to him who abuses the incapacity of such hearers, by obtruding on their easy belief his own fancies, as the doctrines of God! But to the abler hearers of the word, to all, indeed, who are competently instructed in their Religion, the task is not difficult to avoid gross and dangerous delusions, to de-

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termine for themselves *whether the doctrine be of God*, or not. This task, I say, is *not difficult*; yet it implies care and circumspection; and the necessity of discharging it must be allowed a good argument for *taking heed what we hear*.

III. A further reason for this diligence in *hearing*, is, That the hearers are expected and required *to profit by the word spoken*.

The word of wisdom and of knowledge is given to every man to profit withal^d. It is not a curious problem, a fine lecture, a trial of wit, or play of ingenuity, calculated to entertain us for the time, and to be laid aside and forgotten by us again, when the occasion is over. The ministry of the word is of another kind, and destined to higher purposes. It is an instrument of reproof, of exhortation, of instruction in righteousness. *The sword of the spirit* is put into the hands of men for no ends of pageantry and amusement. The minister

^d 1 Cor. xii. 7.

of God *bears it not in vain*. He is entrusted with it to smite the hearts of the wicked, to *pierce through the souls* of unrighteous men, and to flash conviction in the face of unbelievers. It is an ordinance of God, by which he would humble the proud, and convert the obstinate ; strengthen the weak, and confirm the wise, hearer. Whatever our condition, it is to be corrected or improved by the word of God ; whatever our necessities, they are to be relieved by it. But every gift of the spirit, as well as faith, *cometh by hearing* : and that not in the instant, but by degrees ; for the gospel does not illuminate and sanctify men at once ; but by successive improvements, according to the care with which we listen to its admonitions, and the impression they make upon us. Hence it concerns the hearer, that nothing be lost, and that *the good seed* be not committed to the ground in vain. One *truth* received, prepares the mind to entertain a second ; that, a third ; and so on, 'till we become perfect in the knowledge

knowledge of the *faith*. Our moral advances are made in the same manner: one good resolution begets another, which again produces succeeding ones, 'till, through several intervening states, we arrive, or almost arrive, at perfect *obedience*.

And this consideration, indeed, seems to have been immediately present to our Lord, when he delivered the admonition in the text. For so he comments upon, and enforces his own words—*Take heed what ye hear: [for] with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you, and TO YOU THAT HEAR, SHALL MORE BE GIVEN: that is, plainly and certainly, your proficiency in faith and virtue will depend upon the degree of attention ye pay to my word, and shall be proportioned to it; therefore it cannot be too strict and earnest. Nay, our Lord goes farther, and in his jealousy, as it were, for the honour of the word spoken, threatens the listless hearer, that he should not only not advance in religious qualification, but that he should even lose those,*
which

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which he already possessed. *For he that hath, to him shall be given:* AND HE THAT HATH NOT, FROM HIM SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY EVEN THAT HE HATH. And this dispensation of providence, as severe as it may seem, is, I suppose, confirmed by too certain experience, and is analogous to the rest of God's moral government.

It is no slight matter then, *how we hear* And let no idle prejudices prevent or mislead us. The preacher of the Gospel may, on various pretences, be unacceptable to us. Still, the Gospel itself is not *his*, but God's; to which no *circumstance* should indispose us. Nay, in spite of this indisposition, the *preacher*, if we resolve to hear, may profit us. For it is not, I conceive, without example, that such as come to amuse themselves with a stated discourse, or perhaps to censure the discourser, have found their hearts touched by the quickening power of the word, and have returned with serious thoughts and better resolutions.

This,

This, I say, is not too much to expect from the Gospel of Christ, and the grace which attends it, since we find it recorded of a *Pagan moralist*, that, when a young reveller came into his school, flushed with wine, and (as the custom of such was) crowned with flowers, and therefore in no disposition, we may presume, to profit by his instructions; the philosopher, however, chose his topics so well, and pressed them on his gay disciple with such effect, as to send him away in a graver mood, and without his garland *. But,

IV. The last and most important reason of all why we should give an attentive ear to the word of God, is, *That we shall finally be judged by it.*

If the Gospel had only proposed to instruct us in the knowledge of God, that so we might speculate more ably on divine

* ————— potus ut ille

Dicitur ex collo furtim carpsisse coronas,

Postquam est impransu correptus voce magistri.

Hor. 2. Sat. iii. 254.

subjects;

subjects; or, at most, refer the knowledge we acquire to present use; though it could not be denied that such purpose was an important one, yet, if it went no further, we might, if we could allow ourselves in such imprudence, make light of this, as we do of so many other kinds of instruction. We should be ignorant, indeed, and unaccomplished in a very sublime science; but so we are of many others, and yet are contented to remain in that ignorance. We might conduct ourselves foolishly and perversely, and might suffer much inconvenience, and even misery, for want of acting on the principles of this science; but so we do, in many other instances, for want of acting on the maxims of art and prudence in the management of our common concerns, and yet we make a shift to satisfy ourselves with our condition. But if the Gospel follow us into another world; if this immortal volume must be laid open in the presence of men and angels, and our eternal doom, pronounced out of

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it, though we would not obey, or so much as listen to its commands, when they were so earnestly, so repeatedly, in this life pressed upon us; if such be the effect of not *hearing*, how shall we excuse our indifference in this respect, or what can support us under the consciousness of it?

Hear then the awful sentence of Christ himself, denounced in that Gospel—*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; THE WORD that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day* ^f.

Go now, ye careless hearers, ye despisers of the WORD, and justify to yourselves, if ye can, your neglect and scorn of it!

When our Lord himself taught in the streets of Jerusalem, many a *supercilious* Pharisee, we may suppose, passed by, without so much as stopping to hear what this divine teacher had to say to them: others, if they gave attention to his words, were only

^f John xii. 48.

gratifying an idle, perhaps a malignant curiosity; they sought occasion from what he said to intrap him in his discourse, to accuse him to the rulers, or to vilify him in the eyes of the people. Again: when this same doctrine was taught by the Apostle Paul in another proud city, as proud of its philosophic schools, as Jerusalem was of its temple, many a contemptuous sophist, we may believe, disdained to listen at all to the *foolishness of preaching*; and of those few who did, *some*, we know, *mocked*, while others negligently asked their companions, *What would this babler say?* But how will both these be astonished in the last day to find themselves judged by that *word* which they neglected, or contemned; by that word, which they would not *bear*, though it was brought home to their doors, or which they rejected with scorn, when they *did* hear it!

Nor think, because neither Jesus, nor Paul hath preached in person to us, that therefore our case is much different. Jesus and Paul still speak in the ministers of the word:

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word : or, what if the speakers be widely different, the *word* is the same : *this treasure we still have, though in earthen vessels* &c. Nay, in one respect, our guilt exceeds theirs. The Pharisees and Philosophers were, alike, ignorant and unbelieving. We profess *to know*, and *to believe*.

Let us, then, *take heed what we hear* ; lest our knowledge and belief add terrors to that day, when *the neglected word* shall sit in judgment upon us.

2 Cor. iv. 7.

SER-

S E R M O N II.

Preached Nov. 24, 1765.

ROM. xvi. 19.

*I would have you wise unto that which is good,
and simple concerning evil.*

OUR blessed Lord had given it in charge to his followers to be *wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*^a. And the Apostle explains and enforces this command of his Master, when he enjoins us in the words of the text, To be *wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.*

I confine myself, at present, to the former part of the text, and shall enquire into the properties or characters of **CHRISTIAN WISDOM.**

^a Matth. x. 16.

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This wisdom consists in the prosecution of what the Scriptures declare to be the true *end* of man, and by such *means* as they prescribe to us.

That *end* is the SALVATION of our souls ; and the *means*, which lead to it, are FAITH and OBEDIENCE. Thus far there can be no mistake. The *wise Christian* is he who is intent on securing his *eternal* interest ; and who, to that end, fortifies his mind with a firm belief of the *doctrines*, and conducts his life according to the *precepts*, of the Gospel.

I. But PERFECT WISDOM, which consists in a strict attention to these *several* particulars, and according to the true worth of *each*, is rarely the lot of human nature. And there are *two* ways, in which we are most apt to forfeit our pretensions to it. ONE is, when our minds, wholly taken up with the ultimate *object* of their hopes, neglect the *means* which are appointed to bring them to it : The OTHER, when we rest in
the

the intervening *means* themselves, without a due regard to that *final purpose*, for the sake of which they were appointed.

1. The FORMER of these defects we may observe in those persons who, from a too warm and enthusiastic turn of thought, are for subliming all piety into the trances of mystic contemplation: as if *morality* and *faith* scarce deserved their notice; and the *beatific vision* were as well the *object*, as *end* of the Christian life. Here the fault lies in an impatience to come at the *point* we propose to ourselves, without observing the proper *methods* which are to put us in possession of it; and is much the same phrenzy as we should charge on those *travellers*, who, being on their way towards a distant country, stop short in the contemplation of all the wonders they have heard reported of it, without pursuing their journey, or indeed without taking one step towards it.

2. The OTHER defect of wisdom is seen in those less sanguine, and, in truth, lukewarm Christians, who do not, indeed, altogether

neglect the subservient duties of their profession, but, as not enough considering the *prize of their high calling*, grow remiss in the exercise of them: in which they too much resemble those *same travellers*; who, when taking the ordinary means of arriving at their journey's end, fall into an idle way of loitering on the road, and use not that dispatch and diligence in their stages, which an earnest consideration of the *end*, they have in view, should naturally inspire.

II. But this duty of Christian wisdom is further violated, when, with a full respect to our final *hopes and expectations*, and a general intention to pursue them by the *means* appointed in holy Scripture, we do not, however, observe the *due bounds and measures* of each; that is, when, of the *two* appointed means of salvation, *a pure faith*, and *right practice*, we chuse to ourselves a favourite, and incline too much to *one*, at the expence of the *other*. For,

I. With regard to the distinct provinces of FAITH and MORALITY, we know there are

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those, who, provided they are but sound and orthodox in their opinions, that they give an entire assent to the several articles of their creed, and submit their faith to the entire direction of Scripture, or perhaps of the church with which they communicate, suppose the affair of *moral practice* of much less importance ; and conclude their devotion for this acceptable sacrifice of *a right faith* will excuse their making somewhat too free with the article of *obedience*. Such persons there have been and still are in all churches ; but we know *what* sect of Christians is most deeply infected with this error.

2. On the contrary, they who have shaken off this bondage of superstition, and have observed the mischiefs which arise in abundance from this exclusive attachment to creeds and confessions, are very apt to run into the other extreme ; and, because they find *morality* to be of eternal obligation, make the less account of *faith* and right opinion. As the former excess is the peculiar disgrace of *Popery*, this other has frequent-

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ly been objected to *Protestantism*. Both are manifest violations of *Christian wisdom*; which, besides that it commands an equal reverence for the two tables of the divine law, should further instruct us, *that as faith without works is vain*, so *good works themselves*, unassisted and unsanctified by *faith*, are either not so perfect, or not so acceptable from us Christians, as otherwise they might be. Not to observe, that as the articles of our holy faith may be founded on *reasons*, which we do not know, so the belief or rejection of them may have *consequences*, which we cannot foresee.

III. And with this preparation, let us now descend to still more particular reflections on the duty which lies upon us to approve our *wisdom* in the *public profession* of that faith, and the *manifestation* of that practice. *Christian wisdom* requires an attentive regard to the main *end* we have in view, and to the *methods* by which we are instructed to obtain it. But still there is great room for discretion to shew itself in the *management*

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nagement and pursuit of those methods. One *manner* of doing the good, we are appointed to do, will be preferable to another. And it is a great part of Christian prudence to be ready and expert in discovering and acting upon that *preference*. This indeed is a large field; nor is it possible to enumerate all the cases which fall within this province of true wisdom. But to prescribe to ourselves some plan, however defective, we may consider, that, if a constant regard be had to *ourselves*, to our *own character and circumstances*, our virtues will then be most GRACEFUL; if to the exigencies of the *times* and *places* in which we live, most SEASONABLE; and, lastly, if to the *persons, conditions, and characters* of other men, they will thus become most ATTRACTIVE and EFFICACIOUS.

I. It was a point the masters of ancient wisdom took a singular pleasure to inculcate, and we find an equal stress laid upon it by the sacred writers, that a strict *decorum* be observed in the exercise of our virtues; or, in other words, that the *good* we do be that

which is *fit* and *decent*, considering our *circumstances and characters*. Thus we find one set of duties more especially recommended to the *young*, another to the *aged*; some to *private* persons, others to such as are in *place and authority*. Different *professions* in life have also different sets of offices belonging to them; or in such as are *common* to all, propriety demands, that they be evidenced in very different *manners*. The virtues we expect in the *poor man*, are humility, industry and resignation. These too are virtues, from the obligation of which no *rich man* is exempted; but it would be strangely *misbecoming*, if *he* did not surpass the *other* in acts of charity and beneficence. And in respect of the same *common* virtue, suppose *charity*, what the *one* would very commendably discharge by little acts of service and assiduity towards his distressed neighbour, might require a very considerable expence of wealth or labour in the *other*. Nay, the several humours and dispositions of men will occasion a difference,

if
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if not in the *matter* of their duty, yet in the *way* in which it will become them to express it. An eminent moralist, indeed, carried this point of *decorum* very far when he would justify so bad an action, as *suicide*, and which he owns he should have condemned in any other, from the singular turn of Cato's temper and virtue ^b. But thus much may be said with great truth: that an action, good in itself, may come with a better grace from one man than another. A lesson of good advice, for instance, might be requisite from the liveliest man to his friend; but it would have additional weight and propriety from one of a graver disposition: and certainly what the *former* could only hint with address, the *latter* might be allowed to enforce with much earnestness and authority.

In short, if we study *ourselves* and reflect what our *station*, *character*, or *nature* is, we shall best discern what the virtues are, and in what manner to be expressed, which fit most properly and *gracefully* upon us. And

^b Cic. Off. L. i. c. 31.

to give a diligent attention to these is no mean part of *moral wisdom*. But,

2. We must look beyond ourselves; we must consider what the condition of the *times*, what the state of the *places*, in which we live, may require of us. I do not mean that religion is a matter of *policy*; or that virtue is a mere *local* consideration. But when the question is, how we may do the *most* good by our religious or moral conduct, a prudent accommodation of ourselves to time and place will be very necessary^c. The primitive Christians were not *wise unto that which is good*, when they provoked the cruelty of their enemies, and offered themselves without cause to the racks and fires of persecution. Nor would *they* be less blameable, who, in a careless, prophane age, when *silence* would be readily taken for *assent*; when, not to profess the faith would be construed to renounce it, should, from a too scrupulous fear of giving offence, forbear to make an open confession of their religion.

^c See the Story of Musonius Rufus in Tacitus, *Hist. L. iii. c. 81.*

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The exigencies of *times*, we see, are very different. A wise man would have endeavoured to moderate the excessive zeal, which prevailed in the *former* of these periods : he would apply himself to raise and quicken it, were he to find himself in the circumstances described in the *latter*. Or, to explain myself by a case which may still more nearly affect us. There was a *time*, when the religion of our country consisted too much in a zeal for unintelligible articles and superstitious ceremonies ; when Popery had enslaved both mind and body, had bent the *one* to an implicit acquiescence in the doctrines of the Church, and burthened the *other* with a constant unprofitable exercise of its worship. How then was the *wisdom* of a good man to express itself in these circumstances ? In dispelling, it will surely be said, the gloom of superstition ; in asserting the great privileges of natural reason, and in pressing the obligation and necessity of a good life, as of more worth than all ceremonial observances.

This

This *was* the service rendered by the best men of those days to true Religion; and *we* have reason to bless and revere their memories for it. But should the liberty into which we are called, degenerate into licentiousness; should it ever be common for men in the fear of *believing* too much, not to believe what the Scriptures themselves plainly require of them; and from the apprehension of relapsing into their old superstitious practices, to give little or no regard to the duties of external worship: should this at any time be the case, those truly wise men, who laboured so profitably to check the *other* extreme, would certainly, in this different state of things, apply themselves with equal earnestness to correct *this*. Not that their former practice was not good in itself, but that, by a change in the disposition of the times, it was now become less *seasonable*.

3. We are, lastly, to have a regard to the *conditions, characters, and persons* of those with

with whom we converse; this attention being especially requisite to render our virtues *attractive and efficacious*.

The philosopher that took upon him to discourse on the science of war, did not enough consider his own *character*. If he chose to do this in an age which wanted no such instructions, his conduct was certainly *unseasonable*. But when he presumed to instruct the greatest general and commander in the world, he deserved the censure which has disgraced him with all posterity^a. A decorum like this is required in our attempts to promote truth and virtue. To dictate in such matters to persons wiser than ourselves, or to persons, who by their stations and characters should, in all reason, be supposed wiser, is a manifest indiscretion, and can never be attended with any good consequences. Were *we* ever so able to instruct, or were *they* ever so much in want of instruction, *prudence* would suggest a very different conduct. It would recommend to us all the honest arts of insinuation

^a Cic. de Or. L. ii. c. 18.

and

and addrefs; it would oblige us to watch the fitteft feafons and opportunities; or, perhaps, to content ourfelves with the filent admonition of a good example. Or, were there nothing in the *rank and condition* of thofe we would work upon, to refrain us to this caution, we might even be required to fhew a condefcenfion to their very *prejudices and humours*. The errors of men may fometimes be removed by arguing with them on their own mistaken principles; by allowing all that truth and reafon will warrant to their opinions; by putting the faireft construction upon their defigns; by hinting objections to their wrong tenets, inftead of fiercely declaiming againft them; above all, by testifying a fincere difpofition to advance truth and goodnefs, without any indirect views to our own intereft. Or, were all other confiderations out of the cafe, we could never be excufed from proceeding in the way of gentlenefs and civility, from treating them with due refpect, and expreffing the fincereft good-will to their *perſons*. Be
their

their *moral* or *religious* defects, what they will, we should hardly be *wise*; that is, we should take very improper methods of reclaiming them from *either*, if we reprov'd with bitterness, advis'd with insolence, or condemn'd with passion. In all addresses to mistaken or bad men, where our purpose is to inform or amend them, the gentlest *applications* are surely the best, because *these* excite no passion to counteract their *virtue*.

And now, at length, should it be asked who is that WISE CHRISTIAN whom the text designs and recommends to our imitation, we are able to furnish, at least, the outline of his character.

“ HE is one who sets before him the great END and prize of his *high calling*; who, in his progress through the various stages of *this* life, keeps in constant view the immortal happiness which his religion holds out in prospect to him in *another*: who, in humble adoration of his God and Saviour, is content to wait the appointed season which is to crown his hopes and expectations;

tions ; and, for the present, is solicitous to *work out his salvation with fear* and reverence, by an earnest application of his time and pains to those *subservient duties*, which are to qualify him for the enjoyment of Heaven ; who subjects all the towering conceits of his *understanding*, to the *doctrines* of the Gospel, and the impetuous sallies of his *will*, to the *precepts* of it ; who makes no audacious separation of what the wisdom of God hath joined together ; but, whilst he adores the mysteries of his holy FAITH, walks on in the plain and humble path of moral OBEDIENCE. He is *one*, who thinks it not enough to rest in the mere MATTER of his duty, but performs it in such a MANNER as will render it most exemplary and efficacious. He knows it to be a great precept of his religion, to see, *that his good be not evil spoken of*. He would not disgrace the *best* cause in the world by the neglect of those decencies, which, as he observes, have sometimes the strange power to recommend the *worst*. The good he intends there-

therefore, is attempted in such a way, as is most BECOMING of himself; most SEASONABLE in respect of the opportunities which are offered to him; and most agreeable and PERSUASIVE to other men. In short, HE is one who, taking *Prudence* for his guide, and *Innocence* for his companion, thinks himself secure in these attendants; and therefore neglects no *decorum*, which the best philosophy prescribes; no *art*, which the soundest policy suggests; and no *address*, which the politest manners recommend: and so, in the high emphatic sense of the words, approves himself a WISE MAN; *wise unto that which is good*, to all purposes in *this* world, as well as in a *better*."

S E R M O N III.

Preached Dec. 1, 1765.

ROM. xvi. 19.

*I would have you wise unto that which is good,
and simple concerning evil.*

I N considering the first part of this precept,
I endeavoured to give some general description of Religious or CHRISTIAN WISDOM; both in respect of the END it has in view, and of the MEANS employed by it: I further exemplified some of those subordinate WAYS, in which the prudent application even of those *means* is seen and expressed: And all this, for the sake of those sincere, but over zealous persons, who are apt to think that *wisdom* hath little to do in
the

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the prosecution of honest and upright purposes.

It now remains to treat that other part of the text, which requires us to be INNOCENT, as well as *wise*, to be SIMPLE CONCERNING EVIL. And this, perhaps, will be thought the more important branch of the subject. For, generally speaking, the ways of *wisdom*, when our purposes are the very best, are not only the most effectual, but the safest and most convenient. So that *prudence* is likely to be a favourite virtue with us. But the case is different with regard to *simplicity concerning evil*; which is often found a hard and disagreeable injunction; as it may happen to cross our passions and the more immediate views of self-interest. So that this SIMPLICITY will sometimes seem, what the world is ready enough to call it, *folly*: and therefore, for the credit of our *sense*, as well as virtue, we should be well apprized of the worth and excellence of this Christian duty.

The virtue of SIMPLICITY consists, in general, in following the plain ingenuous sense of the mind; in taking our measures according to the dictates of conscience, and acting, on all occasions, without reserve, duplicity, or self-imposture, up to our notions of obligation. It is the office of WISDOM to see that our conscience be rightly informed: But our INTEGRITY is shewn in doing that which conscience, be it erroneously informed or no, requires of us. It consists, in a word, in whatever we understand by an *honesty of nature*; in observing, universally, that which we believe to be *right*, and avoiding what we know, or but suspect ^a to be *wrong*.

This *simplicity of mind* may be almost said to be born with us. It is the bias of nature on our young minds; and our earliest instructions, as well as the first effects of rea-

^a Bene præcipiunt, qui vetant quidquam agere, quod dubites, æquum sit an iniquum: æquitas enim lucet ipsa per se; dubitatio cogitationem significat injuriæ.

Cic. de Off. L. I. ix.

son,

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son, strengthen and confirm it. But the impression lasts not long. We are scarcely entered into life, when we begin to treat it as one of *those childish things*, which it is beneath the dignity of our riper age to be amused with. The passions put forth and grow luxuriant; and why, we say to ourselves, should this tender apprehension of evil check their growth, and restrain their activity? We are now in the season of *pleasure*; and can there be any hurt in taking a little of it, out of that narrow path, which our early prejudices have prescribed to us?

Still, as we advance in years, fresh objects arise, and other passions engage us in the pursuit of them. Wealth and honour, or what we improperly call our *interests*, have now an ascendant over us; and the passion for each is rarely gratified but at the expence of some virtue. And thus it comes to pass, that, though we set out in the world with a warm sense of truth and honour, experience by degrees refines us out of these principles; and our hearts, instead of retaining

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that *infant* purity, the grace and ornament of our nature, and which Christ so especially requires ^b in the professors of his religion, are all over stained with fraud, dissimulation, and disingenuity. We are even proud of the acquisition, and call it a *knowledge of life*: so dextrous are we in giving a good name to our worst qualities !

But effects follow their causes ; and the vice we are now considering is not the less operative, nor the less hurtful, for the specious terms in which we dress it up, and present it to each other.

Of its malignity I shall give two or three instances ; and, to fit them the better for use, they shall be taken from very different quarters ; from the *cabinets of the wise, and the schools of the learned*, as well as from *the vulgar haunts of careless and licentious men*. We shall learn, perhaps, to reverence the Apostle's advice, when we find that the neglect of it has DEGRADED RELIGION ; RELAXED MORALITY, and POLLUTED COMMON LIFE.

^b Math. v, 8.

To

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To begin with an instance which shews how dangerous it is to depart from this *simplicity concerning evil*, in the great concerns of RELIGION.

I. When the priest, the sage, and the politician joined together in the days of heathenism to propagate among the people a superstition, which themselves condemned and detested; when they did their utmost to support a senseless, an immoral, an irreligious worship; when they strove, by every seducing artifice, to keep up that strong delusion, which God, in his just indignation, had sent among them, to believe a *lye*, (for such in its whole fabric and constitution was the old Pagan idolatry) when these men, who *knew the truth*, were yet contented to *bold it in unrighteousness*; they believed, no doubt, nay, they made no scruple to boast, that they had acted with consummate prudence; and that, in sacrificing the interests of religious truth (a small matter in their estimation) they had most effectually provided for the public interest. But what sentence

does the Scripture pass on these men of ancient and renowned wisdom? Why this severe and mortifying one, That *professing themselves wise, they became fools*. And how well they deserved this censure, we understand from their own history; where we read, That Pagan idolatry, thus countenanced and supported, teemed with all the vices, of which our depraved nature is capable; and that the several contrivances of it's wise advocates to keep an impious and barefaced falshood in credit, served only to produce, *first*, a SUSPICION, and in the *end*, an open and avowed CONTEMPT, of all Religion.

However, the ends of *divine wisdom* were greatly promoted by this sad experience of *human folly*. For Christianity, which made its appearance at this juncture, found it an easier task to establish itself on the ruins of a fallen, or falling superstition. *Truth*, which had for so long a time been anxiously kept out of sight, was now the more welcome to those, who wished her appearance. And the

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the detection of those prophane arts, which had been so manifestly employed in that service, disposed the most perverse or careless the more easily to reconcile themselves to her.

And it would have been happy if the sense of this advantage, which the *simplicity of truth* obtained, in the first ages of the Gospel, over all the frauds of imposture, had prevented Christians from copying afterwards what they had so successfully contended against and exposed. Then had a great dishonour of the Christian name been avoided. But that *truth*, whose virtues are here magnified, must not be dissembled. The practice of *lying* for the cause of God, too soon revived, and became too frequent in the Christian world. It is in vain to think of diverting your minds, more especially, from that great part of it, which has long since forgotten to be *simple concerning evil*. But true *wisdom will ever be justified of her children*. These dishonest arts, which could not support a bad cause, have been injurious and disgraceful to the *best*. They
have

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have corrupted the ingenuous spirit of the Gospel, they have adulterated the sincere word of God; and, in both ways, have produced innumerable mischiefs, in civil and religious life. They have helped to bring into discredit or disuse a true *Christian temper*; and have unhappily created in the minds of many an undeserved prejudice against the *Christian faith*.

II. But if these men have dishonoured *Religion*, others have defiled MORALITY; yet both assume to themselves the title of *wise men*; and for that very reason, because they have departed as far as possible from the virtue of *simplicity*.

And here your indignation cannot but rise more especially against a set of men, who, applying the subtleties of school-philosophy to the plain science of Ethics, have made as free with the *precepts* of the Gospel, as some others had done with its *doctrines*. These men, under the respectable name of CASUISTS, have presumed to wind up, or

let down the obligation of moral duties to what pitch they please. Such as have taken the STRICTER side, deserve but small thanks for perplexing the minds of good men with needless scruples; and discouraging the rest with those austerities, which our Religion no where commands, and the condition of human life will not admit. But for that *looser* sort, who by a thousand studied evasions, qualifications, and distinctions dissolve the force of every moral precept; and, as the Pharisees of old, *make the word of God of none effect* by their impious glosses, I know not what term of reproach you will think bitter enough for *them*. The sacred writers thought it sufficient to deliver the rules of life in *general* terms^c; leaving it, as they

^c To the same purpose, Seneca, of the old heathen philosophers: "Antiqua sapientia, says he, nihil aliud, quàm FACIENDA et VITANDA, præcepit: et tunc longè meliores erant viri: postquam docti prodierunt, boni defunct. Simplex enim illa et aperta virtus in obscuram et solertem scientiam versa est, docemurque disputare, non vivere, Senec. Ep. xcv.

well might, to common sense, and common honesty, to make the application of them to *particular* cases, as they chanced to arise. But this officious sophistry intervening and perverting the ingenuous sense of the mind, instructs us how to transgress them all with impunity, and even innocence. By the help of this magic, we may extract the sting of guilt from every known sin; and, if we have but wit enough, may be as wicked as we please with a safe conscience.

If the features of this corrupt casuistry have not been overcharged; or, indeed, if there be any such thing in the world as a corrupt casuistry, it may concern us to reflect, that this pest of society could not have arisen but from a contempt of the Apostles's rule, *of being simple concerning evil.*

III. Hitherto we have exemplified the breach of this rule in the *learned*, and the *wise*. And it may be thought that nothing but perverted science could qualify men for
so

so prodigious a depravity. But there is a casuistry of *the heart*, as well as head; and we find by woeful experience, that men may refine themselves out of that *simplicity* which the Gospel enjoins, without the assistance of *unblessed knowledge*.

For I come now, in the last place, to instance in the vulgar tribes of *libertine and careless men*. Of whom we may observe, that when indulged passion has taught them to make light of an honest mind; the consequence is, that they run into all excesses, and are rarely hindered from *working all uncleanness with greediness*. It is true, indeed, that no man becomes at once desperately and irretrievably wicked. But it is not less true, that when this great step is taken of prevaricating with a man's own conscience, the other stages of iniquity are presently passed over. And how indeed can it be otherwise? So long as a man preserves the integrity of his natural disposition, there is always hope that, though particular passions may prevail for a time, reason and
virtue

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virtue will, in the end, regain their dominion over him. At least, he will be constantly checked and kept back in the career of his vices. But when this sincerity of heart is lost; when he confounds the differences of right and wrong, palliating the deformities of vice, or bestowing on vice itself the attractions of virtue; then all reasonable expectation of a return is cut off; since this perverted ingenuity tends to make him easy under his sins, and leaves him at leisure to pursue his evil courses with security.

We see then from the excesses into which these different sorts of men have been led, by the refinements of POLICY, of ABSURD SCIENCE, and DELUSIVE PASSION, how dangerous it is to bid adieu to that *simplicity concerning evil*, which the Holy Apostle requires of us.

It remains, that we cannot provide too cautiously against those evasive PLEAS AND PRETENCES, which would incline us to part with it.

These

These PRETENCES are infinite : for, when the *heart* is corrupted, the *understanding* is ready to pander to every lust that importunes it. But we may know the principal of them by these signs. To be *simple concerning evil* is the easiest thing in the world ; but we may suspect that something *wrong* is ready to intrude itself, “ WHEN we cast about for excuses to cover the nakedness of ingenuity ; when we are driven to distinctions and far-fetched reasoning for our justification ; when we pause a moment between the clear conviction of duty, on one hand, and any indirect views on the other ; more *particularly*, WHEN we find the tone of our virtue relax at the consideration of what we may chance to lose by adhering to it ; when we but suspect, that a severe unqualifying virtue looks like inhumanity ; when we think our dependencies and connections in life have a demand upon conscience ; when we lament with the politician, that *good men are impracticable*,
and

and so, from a principle of public spirit, resolve not to encounter that prejudice! Above all, when we go about to regulate morality by what *a knowledge of the world* teaches; when *custom* is pleaded in opposition to *duty*, and vice itself authorized by *fashion*^d; when we acknowledge what we do is in itself not justifiable, but excuse it by a pretence of the good ends we hope to serve by it; when we are willing to plead the infirmity of nature, the power of temptation, the prevalence of example; when we venture too securely on the confines of immorality, and are curious to know how near we may go to vice, without being directly vicious."

These, and such as these, are the dangerous insinuations which attempt our virtue. And how, you will ask, shall we secure ourselves from them? By reason and argument? By speculation and philosophy?

^d Corruptere et corrumpi, *saeculum* vocatur. Tacitus.

Shall

Shall we stay to examine their several pretences, call these delusive pleas to account, and shew we can confute them all, before we reject them?

Alas, I dare not advise this method; which, besides its other inconveniences, is not, I doubt, a very safe one. Our heads may be unequal to the task; or, which is worse, our hearts may betray us. At the best, we shall waste much time in these ingenious inquiries, when the business of life demands an immediate determination. St. Paul has shewn us a shorter and *more excellent way*, when he bids us, *Be simple concerning evil*. In virtue of this sacred admonition, a wise man will think it sufficient to dismiss these vain insinuations at once, without so much as spending a thought upon them. "What," he will say to himself, "if I cannot detect
 " the falsehood of these pleas, I have a
 " *heart*, that revolts against them. I cannot, perhaps, disentangle the sophistry
 VOL. II. E " of

“ of these arguments; but I *feel* the
“ baseness of the conclusion, and I *see*
“ in others the folly of acting upon it.
“ It were ill with *vice* indeed, if it had
“ no false colours to appear in; and *error*
“ would be hooted out of the world, if she
“ did not hide her obliquities under the garb
“ of reason. But what are these disguises to
“ me, who am neither dazzled by the one,
“ nor duped by the other? Let the cu-
“ rious, if they will, inquire, wherein
“ the imposture consists: I have that with-
“ in me, which tells me in a moment,
“ they are *but* impostures. In vain then,
“ will such a one conclude, are these
“ insidious attempts on me, who take a
“ sure refuge in the word of God, and
“ the integrity of my own virtue. Be
“ the pretences what they will, the con-
“ futation of them is no part of a
“ Christian's care. I may exercise my
“ understanding profitably in other mat-
“ ters. It is my duty to consider much
“ of

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“ of the ways of *doing good*. I may be
“ prudent and wise here. But, EXPE-
“ RIENCE, and CONSCIENCE, and RELI-
“ GION, command me to be, SIMPLE CON-
“ CERNING EVIL.”

S E R M O N IV.

Preached Nov. 22, 1772.

JOHN V. 44.

*How can ye believe, which receive honour
one of another, and seek not the honour that
cometh of God only?*

IT has been thought unfair to charge unbelief, simply and indiscriminately, on the grosser passions. The observation, I believe, is just: and yet it may be true, notwithstanding, that unbelief is always owing to *some or other* of the passions. The evidences of revealed religion are so numerous, and upon the whole so convincing, that one cannot easily conceive how a reasonable man should reject them all, without

out the intervention of some secret prejudice, or predominant affection.

Of these *prejudices and affections*, one of the commonest, and the most seducing of any to the better sort of unbelievers, is that irregular love of *praise and reputation*, which our Lord condemns in the text—*How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*

The question, we may observe, is so expressed, as if we *could not* receive honour from one another, and believe, at the same time; as if there was a physical, at least a moral impossibility, that these two things should subsist together. And we shall find, perhaps, the expression no stronger, than the occasion required, if, besides other considerations, we attend to the following; which shew how inconsistent a true practical faith in the Gospel is with the solicitous and undistinguishing pursuit of human glory.

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For, I. *The Gospel* delivers many of its doctrines as inscrutable, and silences the busy curiosity of our understandings about them : but the *honour of men* is frequently obtained by indulging this curiosity, and pushing the researches of reason into those forbidden quarters.

II. *The Gospel* demands an humble and reverential awe in the discussion of all its doctrines ; such of them, I mean, as it leaves most free to human inquiry : but this turn of mind is contrary to that high courage and daring intrepidity, which the *world* expects in those who are candidates for its honour.

III. *The Gospel* prescribes an uniform and unqualified assent to whatever it declares of divine things, whether we can or cannot apprehend the reason of such declaration : but this submission to authority, the *world* is ready to call ill-faith, and to consider the defiance of it, as a mark of superior honesty and virtue.

Thus

Thus we see, that WIT, COURAGE, and PROBITY, the three great qualities we most respect in ourselves, and for which we receive the highest honour from each other, appear many times to the world with less advantage in the Christian, than the unbeliever. Not, that Christianity strips us of these virtues: on the other hand, it requires and promotes them all, in the proper sense of the words; and they may really subsist in a higher degree in the *believer*, than any other: but they will often seem to be more triumphantly displayed by those who give themselves leave to *disbelieve*; and the prospect of honour, which that opinion opens to such men, is one of the commonest sources from which they derive their infidelity.

But to make good this charge against the unbelieving world, and to lay open the mysteries of that insidious self-love, which prompts them to aspire to *fame*, by the means of infidelity, it will be necessary to resume the THREE TOPICS before mentioned,

and to enlarge something upon each of them.

I. FIRST, then, I say, That He, who at all adventures resolves to obtain the honour of men, *cannot believe*, because the unrestrained exercise of his wit, by which he would acquire that honour, is inconsistent with the genius and principles of our religion.

The fundamental articles of the Gospel are proposed to us, as objects of faith, not as subjects of inquiry. As they proceed from the source of light and truth, they are founded, no doubt, in the highest reason; but they are for the most part, at least in many respects, inscrutable to our reason. It is enough that we see cause to admit the revelation itself, upon the evidences given of it: it is not necessary that we should carry our researches any farther. It is not safe, or decent, or practicable, in many cases, to do it. The just and sober reasoner is careful to proceed on clear and distinct ideas, and to stop where these fail him. But how soon
does

does he arrive at this point? For the sublime genius of Christianity reminds him, at almost every step, how impossible it is, with the scanty line of human reason, to fathom *the deep things of God*; and represses the fallies of his wit and fancy, with this reflection—*how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* In a word, where he finds the subject too obscure for his understanding to penetrate, or too vast for his ideas to comprehend (and he presently finds this, when he attempts to reason on the mysteries of the Christian faith) he checks his inquiries, he believes, and adores in silence.

But now this silence, this adoration, is ill suited to the restless ambition of the human mind, when it aspires to the reputation of profound and extensive knowledge. The vain reasoner would signalize himself on all subjects, the most abstruse and mysterious, in preference to others; and fears not to carry his presumptuous inquiries to the seat and throne of God. He questions
the

the revealed truths of the Gospel as freely as any other; and finding them many times inexplicable by the principles of human science, he triumphs in the discovery, applauds his own reach of thought, and dazzles the world into a high opinion of his wit and parts. The truth is, he decides on subjects, which he does not, and cannot understand: but the world sees, he decides upon them; and that is generally enough to attract its admiration and esteem.

Again: In such parts of revealed religion, as lie more within the cognizance of human reason, an inquirer may find difficulties, and start objections, which the best instructed believer either does not attempt, or is not able to resolve. Here, the triumph of wit over faith is thought conspicuous, and is indeed seducing. For, while the believer has only to confess his own ignorance, the infidel shines in exposing and enforcing those difficulties and objections: And, when the ingenuity is all on one side,
it

it is rarely suspected, that reason and good sense may be, with modesty, on the other.

Nay, where the point in question can be effectually cleared up, still there will generally seem to be more acuteness in discovering a difficulty, than in removing it: And thus the subtle caviller in religious controversy shall have the fortune to pass for a shrewder man, than the ablest apologist.

And that this advantage of reputation is, indeed, that which free and libertine reasoners propose to themselves, you will see by calling to mind the sort of subjects, which they are fondest to treat, and the sort of character, which they are most proud to assume.

In natural religion, the origin of evil, and God's moral government, are their favourite topics: in revealed religion, the fall of human nature, its restoration by the death and sufferings of Christ, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the adorable Trinity. But why are these high subjects picked out

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to exercise their speculations upon? subjects, in which the sublimest understanding is absorbed and lost; subjects, which they well know (for I speak of the abler men in that party) we have no faculties to comprehend. Why, then, are these subjects preferred to all others? For an obvious cause: to shew how ingenious they can be in perplexing human reason, if any believer should be indiscreet enough to subject these mysterious truths to that test.

But the character, they assume, declares their purpose no less than the arguments they delight to treat. For their pride is to affect a sort of pyrrhonism, or universal doubt and hesitation, even on the plainest points of morals; to controvert the most received principles and opinions; and, as the sophists of old, *to make the worse appear the better reason*, in all questions which they undertake to discuss. Would you desire a stronger proof of the principle which actuates such men?

II. It

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II. It appears, then, how the ostentation of *wit* leads to infidelity. The affectation of COURAGE is another snare to those, who lie in wait for the honour of men.

The believer, it has been observed, presumes not to reason at all on some points of his Religion. In others, he is left at liberty; yet on these, he reasons, always, with great reverence and circumspection. Now, though this conduct be highly fit and proper, it is not so likely to strike the observation of men, as a more forward and enterprizing behaviour. Not only his understanding is restrained, but his spirit, they say, is cramped and broken. The inconsiderate world, on the other hand, is taken with bold assertions, and hazardous positions; which it easily construes into a mark of high courage, as well as capacity. A fearless turn of mind is a dazzling quality, and we do not always distinguish between intrepidity and temerity. Thus it comes to pass, that as the Christian's love of peace,

and charity in common life, so his cautious respect in religious matters, has been treated by libertine men, as pufillanimity. He is considered, in the fashionable world, as a tame and spiritless man; and in the learned world, as a tame and spiritless reasoner.

Hence, when we are bent, at any rate, upon *receiving honour one of another*, we are tempted to make a display, not of our wit only, but our courage: And, as nothing is thought a surer indication of this quality, than to make light of that which the rest of the world hold sacred, we easily see how a passion for this sort of fame betrays the unbalanced mind into all the extravagancies of infidelity.

The instances are frequent, and well-known. When the Philosopher of Malmfbury, in the last century, took upon him to resolve all morality and all religion into the will of the magistrate, whatever other end he might have in view, the bold singularity of this paradox was, no doubt, that which chiefly recommended it to himself, as well

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as surprized the world into an opinion of his bravery: though we know, from his story, that, in fact, he had no more of this virtue, than might well have consisted with faith, and the fear of God. But vain man oft affects to make a shew of that which he does not possess: and thus his defect in true courage, may be the true account of his pretending to so much of it.

Still, the heart of man is more deceitful, than we have hitherto seen, or can easily believe: For who,

III. In the last place, would suspect, that an admiration of INTEGRITY itself, as well as of *wit* and *courage*, should seduce the unwary mind into irreligion? Yet so it is, that men, intoxicated with the love of fame, will sacrifice any virtue, the best quality they have, to the reputation of it.

The true believer admits, with a full and perfect assent, whatever he takes to be clearly revealed in the Gospel; the most impenetrable article of his creed, as well as the

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simplest proposition in morals. All stands with him on the same equal footing of divine authority : no matter, whether he can, or cannot, perceive the grounds of reason, on which the Revelation is founded.

But now this facility of belief, this entire resignation of the understanding to the dictates of heaven, the world is ready to suspect, of dissimulation. And they who live only in the opinion of that world, would not be exposed to so dishonourable a suspicion.

The process of their vanity may be traced in this manner. They have observed, that some persons (of their acquaintance, it may be) pretend to more faith than they have. They suppose the same thing of many others ; and they suppose too, the rest of the world, the more intelligent part of it at least, are in the same opinion. But they pique themselves on their honesty : they will give no man leave to call in question their good faith ; the ornament of their
lives,

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lives, and the idol of their hearts. And thus, as many men are ill-bred, for fear of passing in the world for flatterers; so these men are unbelievers, that they may not be accounted hypocrites.

As extravagant as this turn of mind appears, it cannot be thought incredible; especially when united, as it may be, with that pride of understanding, and courage, before mentioned. “It is not for *me*, (says a presuming inquirer to himself) who am distinguished by a reach of thought and penetration from the vulgar, to admit, without scruple, so extraordinary a system, as that of Revelation. I must doubt and disbelieve, where others see nothing to stop at. Nor is it for a man of my spirit to endure those shackles of reserve and respect, which oppress the timid and servile believer. Above all, it becomes the honesty, I profess, to take no part of my religion upon trust; an easy submission to what is called authority, is, with discerning men, but another name for insincerity. As I tender, then, the reputa-

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tion of my *wit*, my *courage*, and my *integrity*, it concerns me to take heed how I entertain a belief; which may, at once, shake the credit of all these virtues."

This train of sophistry, you see, is not ill laid; and one conceives how a mind, transported with the love of false honour, may be caught by it.

At first, perhaps, the disbelief is *pretended*, only. But pretences^a, continued for any time, become *realities*. And thus, what was assumed, to give us the credit of certain virtues with the world, or with that part of it to which we desire to recommend ourselves, is at length embraced with a sort of good faith; and we are, what we have seemed to be, at the instance indeed of our vanity, but, as we flatter ourselves, for the sake of those very virtues.

Something like this, which I have here described, may have been the case of a

^a Frequens imitatio transit in mores. Quintil.
L. I. c. XI.

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well known philosopher, who would be thought to crown his other parts of ingenuity, and courage, with the purest probity^b. This unhappy man, having published to the world an offensive system of infidelity, and being called to account for it, replies to his censurer in these words—*The world may calumniate me, as it sees fit; but it shall never take from me the honour of being the only author of this age, and of many others, who hath written with good faith*^c.

What shall we say of this strange boast? Was it enthusiasm, or the pride of virtue, that drew it from him? This *honest* man, we will say, might believe himself, when he talked at this rate: but then we must conclude, that nothing but the most intemperate love of praise could have wrought him up to so frantic a persuasion.

^b *Vitam impendere vero.* His motto.

^c Mes ennemies auront beau fair avec leurs injures; ils ne m'ôteront point l'honneur d'être un homme veridique en toute chose, d'être le seul auteur de mon siècle, & de beaucoup d'autres, qui ait écrit de bonne foi.

Roussseau, Lettre à M. de Beaumont.

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I suppose, it may now appear how easily we become the dupes of any favourite passion; and how perfect an insight our Lord had into the nature of man, when he asserted in the text—*that we cannot believe, if we will receive honour one of another. We cannot,* you see, *believe*; because, if that honour be the ultimate end and scope of our ambition, the best faculties we possess, the fairest virtues of our hearts, will pervert, and, in a manner, force us into infidelity.

Let this humiliating consideration have its full effect upon us. Above all, let it check, or rather regulate that ardent desire of fame, which is so predominant in young and ingenuous minds. Let such learn from it to mistrust their passions, even the most refined and generous, when they would inquire into the evidences of their religion. Let them remember that *reason*, pure impartial reason, is to direct them in this search; that the passion for honour is in all cases, but particularly in this (where it is so seducing) an unsafe and treacherous guide;

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guide ; and that, to escape the illusions of infidelity and a thousand other illusions, to which they will otherwise be exposed in common life, one certain method will be, To controul their love of fame, by the love of truth ; which is, in other words, *to seek the honour, that cometh of God, only.*

S E R M O N V.

Preached April 23, 1769.

JOHN ix. 41.

Jesus saith to them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin ; but now ye say we see, therefore your sin remaineth.

THESE words were spoken by our Lord on occasion of a great miracle performed by him, in restoring a man *born blind* to his sight. This wonderful display of power had its natural effect on the man himself, in converting him to the faith of Jesus ; while the Pharisees, who had the fullest evidence laid before them of the *fact*, persisted obstinately in their infidelity. Yet the

the *blind* man, on whom this miracle had been wrought, was one of those whom the Pharisees accounted *blind* in understanding, also; in other words, he was a plain unlettered man; whereas they themselves were *guides to the blind*, that is, they pretended to a more than ordinary knowledge of the law and the prophets, by which they were enabled to conduct and enlighten others.

Jesus, therefore, respecting at once his late restoration of the blind man's *sight*, and the different effects of that miracle on the *minds* of the two parties, applies, with singular elegance, to himself, the famous prediction of Isaiah—*For judgment, says he, am I come into this world, that they, which see not, might see; and that they who see, might be made blind.* The Pharisees were, indeed, sharp-sighted enough to perceive the drift of this application, and therefore said to him, in the same figurative language, *Are we blind also?* To whom Jesus replied in the words of the text, *If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say we see, therefore*

your sin remaineth. As if he had said, “If ye were indeed ignorant of the law and the prophets, as ye account this poor man to be, ye might have some excuse for not believing in *me*, who appeal to that law and those prophets for the proof of my mission; but being so skilled in them, as ye are, and profess yourselves to be, ye are clearly convicted of a willful, and therefore criminal, infidelity.”

It is implied, we see, in this severe reproof of the Pharisees, that knowledge and faith very well consist together, or rather that, where *knowledge* is, there *faith* must needs be, unless a very perverse use be made of that knowledge.

But to this decision of our Lord, the unbelieving world is ready to oppose its own maxims. “It sees so little connection between *faith* and *knowledge*, that it rather concludes them to be incompatible: It allows the ignorant, indeed, who cannot *walk by sight*, to *walk by faith*; but, as for the knowing and intelligent, the men of science
and

and understanding, it presumes that *faith* cannot be required of these; and that, BECAUSE *they see*, it is too much to expect of them, *to believe in Jesus.*"

It is true, the persons, who speak thus slightly of *faith*, are not the most distinguished in the world by their own parts, or knowledge. But a certain mediocrity of *both*, inflated by vanity, and countenanced by fashion, is forward to indulge in this free language; and the mischief done by it to Religion, is so great, that it may not be amiss to expose, in few words, the indecency and folly of it.

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE, then, it is said, are at variance with each other. Why? The answer, I suppose, will be, Because *faith* is in itself *unreasonable*; in other words, it will be said, That the *evidences* of our religion are not convincing, and that the *doctrines* of it are not credible.

One word, then, on *each* of these bold insinuations.

I. The

I. The EVIDENCES of *revealed religion* are so many and various; they lye so deep, or extend so wide; and consequently the difficulty of collecting them into one view is so great, that few men have, perhaps, comprehended the full force and effect of them. At least, none but persons of very superior industry, as well as understanding, have a right to pronounce on the total amount of such evidence.

But the *chief* evidences of the *Christian Religion* are drawn from PROPHECIES, and MIRACLES; and who are they who tell us, that these methods of proof are unreasonable or unsatisfactory?

I. That the argument from PROPHECIES should not convince those, who have not considered the occasion, and design of them, the purposes they were intended to serve, and therefore the degree of light and clearness, with which it was proper they should be given; who have not studied the language in which those prophecies are conveyed, the state of the times in which they

they were delivered, the manners, the customs, the opinions of those to whom they were addressed; above all, who have not taken the pains to acquire a very exact and extensive knowledge of history, and so are not qualified to judge how far they have been accomplished; that to such persons as these, I say, the argument from prophecy should not appear to have all that evidence which believers ascribe to it, is very likely; but then this effect is to be accounted for, not from their knowledge, but their ignorance, not from their *seeing* too clearly, but from their not seeing at all, or but imperfectly, into the merits of this argument. As for those, who have searched deepest, and inquired with most care, into this kind of evidence, they depose unanimously in its favour, and profess themselves to have received conviction from it. So that, although there may be difficulties in explaining particular prophecies, and though the completion of some be questioned, or not fully apprehended, yet, on the whole, there is so much
light

light arising out of this evidence, that it must be great presumption in any man to say that there is no strength at all in it. Indeed, if the appeal lie to authority (as it must do, if men will not, or cannot, inquire for themselves) we can scarce help concluding that the argument from prophecy carries with it a very considerable degree of evidence, since we find that such a man as Newton, not only submitted to this evidence himself, but thought it no misapplication of his great talents to illustrate and enforce it. Yet, such is the judgment or temper of our leaders^d in infidelity, that they had rather

^d “ Une preuve de sa bonne foi, c’est qu’il [M. Newton] a commenté l’Apocalypse. Il y trouve clairement que le Pape est l’Antichrist, & il explique d’ailleurs ce livre comme tous ceux qui s’en sont mêlés. Apparemment qu’il a voulu par ce commentaire CONSOLER LA RACE HUMAINE de la supériorité qu’il avoit sur elle.” Œuvres de Voltaire, T. v. c. 29. 1757.

“ If he [K. James I.] has composed a commentary on the Revelations, and proved the Pope to be Antichrist;

ther turn this very circumstance to the discredit of human nature itself (exhibited in its fairest form, and shining out with full lustre, in the virtues and accomplishments of that divine man) than allow it to do honour to that immortal object of their fear and spite, revealed religion.

2. The other great foundation of our faith is laid in MIRACLES; a sort of evidence, which may be estimated without that learning, or that sagacity, which is required in the case of *prophecies*; and which some men thorefore, out of the abundance of their common sense, have taken the freedom to account of little weight or value. Yet, what

“ christ; may not a similar reproach be extended to the
 “ famous Napier; and even to NEWTON, at a time
 “ when learning was much more advanced than during
 “ the reign of James? From the grossness of its super-
 “ stitions, we may infer the ignorance of an age; but
 “ never should pronounce concerning THE FOLLY OF
 “ AN INDIVIDUAL, from his admitting popular errors,
 “ consecrated with the appearance of religion.” Hume’s
 Hist. of G. B. Vol. vi. p. 136. Lond. 1763. 8vo

opinion soever these persons may have of their own understandings, they will scarce be able to convince a reasonable man that this evidence is not conclusive, and even incontestible, if they will but place it in a fair and just light. For the question is not concerning the evidence of miracles in *general*, but of miracles so circumstanced and so attested as those of the *Gospel*. Now, when the Religion to which this attestation is given, has nothing in it which appears unworthy of the deity; when the purpose for which the supposed miracles are wrought is such as must be allowed the most important of any that, in our ideas, could enter into the divine counsels with regard to mankind; when these miracles have further the advantage of being attested by the most unexceptionable characters, and of being recorded in books, written soon after they were wrought, and by those who saw them wrought, and in books too, which have been transmitted, without any note of suspicion

picion on them, to our times ; when, lastly, these miracles have all the circumstances of public notoriety attending them, when no contemporary evidence discredits, and when many otherwise inexplicable facts and events, suppose and confirm them ; when such miracles, I say, as these, and under such circumstances only, are alledged in support of the Christian Revelation, it must be a very extraordinary turn of mind that can reject, as nothing, the evidence resulting from them. With any other miracles, however numerous, however confidently asserted, or plausibly set forth, we have nothing to do. There may have been ten thousand impostures of this sort, in the world. But *these* miracles speak their own credibility so strongly, that they are admitted, on human testimony, with the highest reason ; and it must be more than a slender metaphysical argument, taken from their contrariety to what is called experience, which can prevent our belief of them, and overpower the natural sense of the human mind.

It

It seems then, even on this slight view of the subject, that, if these two capital arguments from *prophecies and miracles*, for the truth of Christianity, appear inconclusive to unbelievers, the cause must be some other than a want of that evidence, which may satisfy a reasonable man.

II. But, perhaps the DOCTRINES of Christianity are such as revolt the rational mind, and are not capable of being supported by any evidence.

Let us inquire then what truth there is in this *second* allegation of unbelievers.

It is not possible, in a discourse of this nature, to enter into a detail on the subject; but the chief obstacles to a faith in Jesus, independently of the evidence on which it rests, are, I suppose, these two.

1. A confused idea, that the law of nature is sufficient to the salvation of mankind;

2. The mysterious nature of the Christian revelation.

Reason,

Reason, they say, is a sufficient guide in matters of Religion; therefore, Christianity is unnecessary: Again, Christianity is all over mysterious; therefore, it is unreasonable.

Now it will not be presuming too much to say, that the greater advances any man makes in true knowledge, the more insignificant must these *two* great stumbling-blocks of infidelity needs appear to him.

1. And, *first, for the sufficiency of nature in matters of religion.*

Whether *nature* be a sufficient guide in *morals*, let the history of mankind declare. They who know most of that history, and have, besides, a philosophic knowledge of human nature, are the proper judges of the question; and to that tribunal I leave it: the *rather*, because, though it be very clear what its decision must be, I hold, that what is most essential to the Christian religion (which is a very different thing from a *republication of the law of nature*) is not at all concerned in it.

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Let the law of nature be what it will, under this idea of a guide in morals, let Socrates, if you please, be as great a master of it, as Jesus, still the importance of Christianity remains, and is indeed very little affected by that concession.

Our religion teaches, that man is under the sentence of mortality, and that immortal life in happiness, (which is the true idea of Gospel-salvation) is the gift of God through Christ Jesus. These it relates as *two* facts, which it requires us to believe on its own authority; *facts*, which could not otherwise have come to our knowledge, and on which the whole superstructure of Christianity is raised.

Now, let the men of reason, the men who say, WE SEE, tell us, whether they are sure that these facts are false; and, if they are not, whether they know of any natural means by which *that sentence of mortality* can be reversed, or *that gift of immortality* can be secured.

Yes,

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Yes, they will say, by *a moral and virtuous life*, and by *a religious trust*, which nature dictates, *in the goodness of the Deity*. What? Is any man so assured of his own virtue, as that he dares expect so great things from it? Does he think it so perfect and of such efficacy, as that it should remove a curse which lies on his nature, that it should redeem him from a general sentence, which is gone forth against all mankind? Is it not enough, that he does his duty (though where is the man that does that?) and thereby consults his own true interest in this world, without requiring that his merits should deliver him from the doom of death; or that, of force, they should compel the divine *goodness* to deliver him from it?

But say, that the boundless mercy of God might so far consider the poor imperfect virtues of his lost creature, as to free him from the bondage of *death*, will he pretend that he has any claim, even upon infinite goodness itself, for *eternal life in glory*?

glory? All that reason suggests is, that, some way or other, either in this state or in one to come, he shall be no loser by his virtue: but so immense a reward is surely, not of *right*; and reason is too modest to entertain the least expectation, or even thought of it.

You see then what *the sufficiency of nature* comes to: It leaves us, for any thing we know, under the sentence of *death*; and, for anything we can do, very much short of *eternal life*. And is this all we get by following *nature*, as our all-sufficient guide, and rejecting the assistance of *Revelation*? Are men satisfied to live, as they do here, and then to die for ever; and all this, rather than condescend to lay hold on the mercy of God through Jesus? If they are, their ambition is very moderate; but, surely, this is not a moderation of that sort which is prescribed by *reason*.

2. But they fly now (and it is their last resource) to the *mysterious nature of the dispensation itself*, which, they say, is perfectly

irreconcilable with the principles of natural reason.

That Christianity is *mysterious*, that is, that it acquaints us with many things which our faculties could not have discovered, and which they cannot fully comprehend or satisfactorily explain, is an undoubted truth.—The pride of reason, when, from human sciences, where it saw much and thought it saw every thing, it turns to these divine studies, is something mortified to find a representation of things very different from what it should previously have conceived; and impenetrable in many respects by its utmost diligence and curiosity. But then, when further exercised and improved, the same reason presently checks this presumption, as seeing very clearly, that there are inexplicable difficulties every where, in the world of *nature*, as well as in that of *grace*, and as seeing too, that, if both systems be the product of infinite wisdom, it could not be otherwise. Next, a thinking man, as his knowledge extends, and his mind opens, easily apprehends,

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hends, that, in such a scheme as that of Christianity, which runs up into the arcana of the divine councils in regard to man, there will be many particulars of a new and extraordinary nature; and that such a dispensation must partake of the obscurity in which its divine author chuses to veil his own glory.

Thus we see, how the objections to the mysterious nature of the Gospel spring out of pride and inconsideration, and are gradually removed, as the mind advances in the further knowledge of God and itself.

Now, suppose there had been no mysterious parts in this Revelation, and that every thing had lain clear and open to the comprehension of natural reason, what would the improved understanding of a wise man have thought of it? Would he not have said, that the whole was of mere human contrivance? since, if it were indeed of divine, it must needs have spoken its original by some marks of divinity, that is, by some signatures of incomprehensible wisdom, impressed upon it,

Consider,

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Consider, I say, whether this judgment would not have been made of such a Revelation ; and whether there be not more sense and reason in it, than in that *other* conclusion which many have drawn from the mysterious nature of the Christian religion.

IT MAY APPEAR, from these cursory observations, that *faith and knowledge* are no such enemies to each other, as they have been sometimes represented ; and that neither the *evidences* of Christianity, nor the *doctrines* of it, need decline the scrutiny of the most improved reason. Conclude, therefore, when ye hear a certain language on this subject, that it is equally foolish, as it is indecent ; and that ye may safely profess a *belief* in Jesus, without risking the reputation of your *wisdom*.

Another conclusion is, that, when unbelievers lay claim to a more than ordinary share of sense and penetration, we may allow their claim, if we see fit, for other reasons, but NOT for their disdainful rejection of our divine religion. We must have better proofs

of their sufficiency than this, before we subscribe to it. We may even be allowed to conclude, from this circumstance of their unbelief, that they either *see not* so clearly as they pretend, or that the case is still worse with them, if they do. They are ready to ask us, indeed, in the prompt language of the Pharisees to our Lord, *Are we blind also?* To which question, having such an answer at hand, we need look out for no other than that of Jesus, *If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say we see, THEREFORE your sin remaineth.*

S E R M O N VI.

Preached May 12, 1771.

I COR. viii. 1.

Knowledge puffeth up; but Charity edifieth.

THERE is none of our little accomplishments, or advantages, which we are not apt to make the foundation of pride and vanity. When, upon comparing ourselves with others, in any respect, we *entertain* a higher opinion of ourselves than we ought, this sentiment is called PRIDE. And when we are forward to *express* the good opinion, we have of ourselves, to others, in our words or actions, (even though

though such opinion be but proportioned to our desert) we give to this disposition the name of VANITY. Each of these affections of the mind is, a real vice : *Pride*, because it violates truth and reason ; and *Vanity*, because it violates Christian charity.

But, of all the subjects of comparison which betray us into these vices, none is thought to produce them so easily, and to inflame them to that degree, as *learning or knowledge*. And we see the reason why it should be so. For knowledge arises from the exertion of our best and noblest faculties ; those faculties which distinguish us to most advantage, not only from the inferior creatures, but from each other. Hence we are naturally led to place a higher value on this, than other acquisitions ; and to make our pride and boast of that which is, indeed, the glory of our nature.

The observation then seems well founded ; and the Apostle advances no more than what experience teaches, when he affirms in the text—THAT KNOWLEDGE PUFFETH UP.

Where,

Where, however, we are to take notice, that the remedy for this vice is not ignorance (which, though for different reasons, is as apt to engender pride and self-conceit, as knowledge itself) but Christian love and charity. For, when the Apostle had brought this charge against *knowledge, that it puffeth up*, he does not say that *ignorance* keeps men humble, but that *charity edifieth*. Whence it appears, that, to correct this excess of self-love, which we call pride, the Apostle would not have us renounce the way of learning and knowledge, but only increase our love and respect for mankind.

Charity, then, is the proper cure of LEARNED PRIDE; and of those unfriendly vices, which spring from it, *sufficiency, self-importance, and ostentation*: And it will be worth our while to consider, *in what RESPECTS*, and *by what MEANS*, this divine principle of charity contributes to that end. And this it does

1. By keeping men steady to that OBJECT, which they ought to propose to themselves

selves in the cultivation of knowledge, I mean the *edification of each other—charity edifieth.*

One of the antient sects of philosophy carried their admiration of *knowledge* so far, that they made it *the supreme good* of man, and built their whole *moral* system (if it might be called such) on this extravagant idea. Whereas, common sense, as well as religion, teaches, that knowledge, like our other faculties and attainments, is only an instrument of doing good to others; not to be regarded by us, as the end of moral action, or a good simply in itself, but as one of those means by which we may express our moral character; and promote the common interest of society, which (in subordination to the will and glory of God) is the proper end of man. Now, if we keep this end in view, which Christian charity sets before us, we shall neither cultivate knowledge for its own sake (which is a strain of fanaticism, unsuited to our present condition); nor for the sake of that complacency, which
may

may be apt to result from it ; nor solely, for any other selfish purpose to which it may serve : but we shall chiefly and ultimately refer it to the use and edification of our brother ; and shall therefore suppress that inordinate elation of heart and display of vain-glory, which tend so much to obstruct the success of our applications to him in this way.

2. Charity, estimating the value of knowledge by the good it *actually* does to others, finds the very foundation of pride and vanity, in the application of it, in a great measure taken away. For, how divine a thing soever knowledge may appear to the mind, when heated by speculation, we shall find, in practice, that it falls very much short of those glorious ideas we had formed of it ; that the *real service*, we are enabled to do to mankind by our most improved faculties, affords but little occasion to the gratulations of self-esteem (which, when resulting from such service, are, no doubt, more pardonable

donable than in any other case whatsoever) ; and that, if such gratulations arise in us from some slight and partial services done to others, they are sufficiently checked and mortified by the general ill success of our most strenuous endeavours, and best concerted designs. The philosopher and divine, after many studious days and sleepless nights, are ready to promise to themselves great effects from their systems and apologies. Alas, the world is little bettered or improved by them. Its amusements, its follies, its vices, take their usual course. Reason and knowledge are found but feeble instruments of its conversion. It attends so little, or so negligently to its instructors, that it remains almost as uninformed, and as corrupt as before.

Such is too commonly the issue of our best pains in the cultivation of moral and religious truth ! Or, if in some rare cases it be otherwise, and some sensible, some considerable, benefit result from them, still it

will be far less than the good man wishes and intends. For, burning with this holy zeal of love to mankind, the charitable instructor of the ignorant is in the condition of HIM, whose ambitious zeal the poet so well describes : His successes do but inflame his desires ; and *he reckons he has done nothing, so long as there remains any thing for him to do* *.

So certainly does charity, in this work of learned instruction, disconcert and subdue all the projects and emotions of pride !

3. Charity takes a sure way to counteract those movements of vanity and self-applause, which the pursuits of knowledge are apt to excite, *by confining our attention to solid and important subjects*. For, when the mind is thus employed, it naturally refers its acquisitions to *use*, not vanity ; or, if vanity should still find room to spring up with this crop of useful knowledge, its

* Nil actum credens, dum quid superesset agendum.
Lucan.

growth would be much checked by this benevolent and social attention: It would either die away amidst these higher regards of duty and public spirit, or would lose at least very much of its malignant nature, and of those qualities which render it so offensive to mankind. Whereas; when we employ ourselves on frivolous or unimportant subjects, which offer nothing to our view besides the ingenuity of the speculation, and the distinction of the pursuit, these ideas are so present to the mind, and engross it so much, that vanity and self-esteem almost necessarily spring from them, luxuriant and unrestrained.

Besides, the mind, which loves to justify itself in all its operations, finding but little real use or worth in these disquisitions, strives to make itself amends by placing an imaginary value upon them; and grows so much the more enamoured of them, as it foresees and expects the neglect and indifference of other men.

Hence,

Hence, the sufficiency of such persons as wholly employ their time and pains in the more abstract studies, in the minuter parts of learning, and universally in such inquiries as terminate only or chiefly in curiosity and amusement, is more than ordinarily glaring and offensive. Their minds are *puffed up* with immoderate conceptions of their own importance; and this unnatural tumour they are neither able, nor willing, to conceal from others. The secret is, they would persuade themselves first, and then the world, that their studies and occupations are less frivolous, than they in earnest believe or suspect them, at least, to be.

Now, Charity, indisposing us to these fruitless speculations, and delighting to cultivate such parts of knowledge as have a real dignity in them, and are productive of light and use, tends directly to keep us modest, by taking away this so natural temptation to pride and self-conceit.

4. Further, we may observe that, of the more important studies themselves, such

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as we call *practical*, are less liable to this perversion of vanity, than the speculative, to what important ends soever they may ultimately be referred. And the reason of the difference is, that, in the former case, the calls of charity upon us are more instant. We cannot stir a step in practical meditations without considering what use and benefit may result from them: while the speculative seem to terminate in themselves; are pursued, for the time at least, for their own sakes; and so, by keeping the ultimate end out of sight, do not divert the mind enough from that complacent attention to its own ingenious researches, whence the passion of pride is apt to take its rise.

Not but there are some parts of knowledge, which, though called practical, and referring indeed to practice, have a different effect. But these are such, as are in their own nature boastful and ostentatious; calculated not so much for use, as pleasure; or, at most, terminating in some private and selfish end. The proficients in these

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popular arts and studies are tempted to regard, not the good *simply*, which their knowledge might do to others, but the general influence of it, and the consideration, which, by means of such influence, whether to a good or bad purpose, they may draw to themselves.

Of this sort was, too commonly, the study of eloquence in the antient, and sometimes, I doubt, in the modern world. Vanity is apt to mix itself with these practical studies, and to result from them; the question generally being, not how the greatest good may be effected by them, but how the greatest impression may be made.

Divine and moral subjects, *practically* considered (though vanity may creep in here), are more secure from this abuse. For, respecting the spiritual and moral good of men, distinctly and exclusively, a regard to the end must correct and purify the means. And thus we are not surpris'd to find, that, while a vain rhetorician ^b is said

^b HIPPIAS, THE ELEAN. Cic. de Oratore, c. 32.

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to have boasted, in the hearing of all Greece, that *he knew every thing*, the sober moralist of Athens ^c readily confessed, *he knew nothing*.

5. Another way, in which *charity* operates to the suppression of *pride*, is, *by increasing our good opinion of other men*. *Pride* is an elation of mind upon comparing ourselves with others, and observing how much we excell them in any respect; and, in the present instance, how much we excell them in point of *knowledge*. When the mind is wholly occupied by *self-love*, it easily magnifies its own attainments, and as easily diminishes those of others: whence the advantage, on a comparison, must needs be to *itself*. But when *charity*, or the love of others, prevails in us to any degree, we are willing to do them *justice* at least, and *but* justice to ourselves: nay, our affection to others makes us willing to see their good qualities in the fairest light, to magnify to

^c SOCRATES.

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ourselves their excellencies, and to lessen or overlook their defects; while on the other hand, it inclines us readily to forego any undue claims of preeminence, and even to abate something of what we might strictly claim to ourselves: whence the comparison must be more favourable to *others*; and our pride, if not entirely prevented, must be considerably reduced. Increase this charity, and the pride still lessens; till, at length, it is almost literally true, as the Apostle divinely expresses it, that, *in lowliness of mind, each esteems other better than himself*; better, in respect to *knowledge*, as to every thing else.

6. Lastly, charity, not only by its qualities, but in the *very nature of things*, is destructive of all *pride*. For what is pride, but an immoderate *love* of ourselves? And what is charity, but a fervent *love* of other men? It is the same passion of love, only directed to different objects. When it is concentrated in a man's self, it naturally grows abundant and excessive: divert some part of

it upon others, and the selfish love is proportionably restrained. Just as seas and rivers would overflow their shores and banks, if they had no outlet or circulation: but issuing forth in useful streams or vapours to refresh the land, they are kept in due proportion, and neither deluge the rest of the globe, nor drain themselves. Thus the affection of *love*, if too much confined, would overflow in *pride and arrogance*; but, when part of it is diffused on others, the rest is innoxious and even salutary, as supplying the mind only with a *just and moderate self-esteem*.

Hence we see that charity, by its very operation, corrects the excesses of self-love; and therefore of learned pride (which is *one* of those excesses) as well as any other vice, which the confined and inordinate exercise of that passion is apt to produce.

In these several ways then, whether, by prescribing the proper *end* of knowledge,
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the edification of our neighbour, an attention to which must needs lessen the temptation to pride; or, by suggesting how *imperfectly* that end is attained by knowledge, which must mortify, rather than inflame our pride; or, by confining the candidates of knowledge *to solid and important subjects*, and, of *these*, rather to *practical* subjects, than those of speculation, both which pursuits are unfavourable to the growth of pride; or, by increasing *our good opinion of others*, engaged in the same pursuits of knowledge, which must so far take from our fancied superiority over them; or, lastly, *by the necessary effect of its operation*, which is essentially destructive of that vicious self-love, which is the parent of such fancies—In *all* these respects, I say, it is clearly seen how CHARITY, whose office it is to *edify* others, is properly applied to the cure of that tumour of the mind, which knowledge generates, and which we know by the name of LEARNED PRIDE.

There are many other considerations, no doubt, which serve to mortify this pride; but nothing tends so immediately to remove it, as the increase of charity. It is therefore to be wished, that men, engaged in the pursuits of learning, would especially cultivate in themselves this divine principle. Knowledge, when tempered by humility, and directed to the ends of charity, is indeed a valuable acquisition; and, though no fit subject of vain-glory, is justly entitled to the esteem of mankind. It should further be remembered, that this virtue, which so much adorns knowledge, is the peculiar characteristic grace of our religion; without which, all our attainments, of whatever kind, are fruitless and vain. Let the man of Science, then, who has succeeded to his wish in rearing some mighty fabric of human knowledge, and from the top of it is tempted with a vain complacency to *look down*, as the phrase is, *on the ignorant vulgar*;

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vulgar ; let such an one not forget to say
with HIM, who had been higher yet,
even as high as *the third Heaven* ^d,
“ *Though I understand all mysteries, and*
“ *all knowledge, and have not charity, I am*
“ *nothing* ^e.”

^d 2 Cor. xii. 2.

^e 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

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S E R M O N VII.

Preached Nov. 19, 1769.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, XXVI. 9.

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

THE case of the Apostle, Paul, as represented by himself in these words, is so remarkable, that it cannot but deserve our attentive consideration.

The account of *those many things*, which he thought himself obliged to do against the name of Jesus, during his unbelieving state, he gives us in the chapter whence the text

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is taken. *These things*, continues he in his apology to king Agrippa, *I did in Jerusalem, and many of the Saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief-priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them, even to strange cities.* And then he proceeds to speak of his going, with the same authority, and the same zeal, to persecute the Christians that were at Damascus; when, in his journey thither, he was suddenly stopt in the career of his impiety by a heavenly vision, which had the effect to overturn his former persuasion, and to make a full convert of him to the Christian faith.

1. From this account of himself, we learn, that Paul, in his Jewish state, had been carried, by his zeal, into all the horrors of persecution. And *these things*, he says, *he verily believed he ought to do, contrary to the name of Jesus.*

“ But

“ But what, you will ask, did this *belief* then justify those crimes? And, are blasphemy, murder, and persecution, innocent things, from the time that a man persuades himself he ought to commit them? This would open a door to all the evils of the most outrageous fanaticism, and evacuate the whole moral law, under the pretence of conscience.”

In general, it would do so: and we shall presently find, that St. Paul does not pretend to justify *himself*, notwithstanding *he verily believed he ought to do these things*. But to see the degree of his crime, it will be convenient, and but just to the criminal, to call to mind, in the first place, the peculiar circumstances under which it was committed.

Paul was at that time a Jew; and, as a follower of this law, his conduct, supposing his conscience to have been rightly informed, had not been blameable; on the contrary, had been highly meritorious. For the law of Moses made the restraint of opinions,

nions, in matter of religion, lawful: Heterodoxy was to a Jew but another word for disloyalty; and a zeal to see the rigour of the law executed on that crime, was the honour of a Jewish subject. Paul, then, conceiving of Jesus as a false prophet, and the author of a new worship, contrary to that of the God of Israel, Paul, I say, regarding Jesus in this light, but conformed to the spirit of the law, when he joined in persecuting the Jewish Christians, and must esteem himself to have deserved well of it.

And this he, in fact, did. For, reckoning up the several merits, which, as a Jew, he might claim to himself, he mentions this zeal of persecution, as one, which did him honour, under that character—*Concerning zeal*, says he, PERSECUTING THE CHURCH^a.

The crime of Paul, then, as of the other Jews, in persecuting Christ and his religion, was not *simply* the crime of persecution

^a Philip. iii. 6.

(for,

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(for; had that religion been a false one, by the peculiar structure of the Jewish œconomy, there would have been no crime at all in punishing such of the Jews, as professed themselves of it); but his guilt was, and, in general, the guilt of the other Jews was, in misapplying the law to this particular case; in persecuting a just and divine person, whom their own prophets had foretold and pointed out, who came in no opposition to the Jewish law, nay, who came *not to destroy, but to fulfill* ^b.

The conclusion is, that, though *persecution* be on no pretence of conscience excusable in another man, yet in a Jew, and as directed against an apostate Jew, it had not this malignity, and was not the proper subject of his abhorrence ^c.

^b Matth. v. 17.

^c BAYLE, Comm. Phil. Part II. Ch. IV. LOCKE on Toleration, Letter I. WARBURTON, D. L. B. v. S. II.

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To the question then, “Whether Paul’s belief justified his practice, in the case before us, that is, whether he did right *in doing that which he verily believed he ought to do,*” You may take his own answer—*This, says he, is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, OF WHOM I AM CHIEF* ^d. He owns himself, we see, to have been *the chief of sinners*, that is, making all allowance for the hyperbole and modesty of the expression, a very great sinner. And if you ask in what respect, he tells you that, too: for, in the immediately preceding verses, he declares the ground of this charge upon himself, *That he had been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious.* And in another place he says of himself, *I am the least of the Apostles; that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of God* ^e.

^d 1 Tim. i. 15.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 9.

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You see, then, that, notwithstanding his former religion authorized him to persecute its enemies, notwithstanding he verily believed, that he ought to persecute Jesus as such, yet he now condemns himself, as having grievously sinned in giving way to that authority, and to that persuasion. How is this conduct to be accounted for and made consistent? plainly, by observing, that he had persecuted without warrant, even from his former religion; that he had culpably and rashly overlooked (what he might and ought to have seen) that Jesus was no fit object of this severity even to a Jew, that he was no enemy or subverter of the Jewish law, that he was no rebel to the God and king of Israel, but came indeed from him, acted by his commission, and displayed all the signs and credentials of the Messiah, in whom the law and the prophets were finally to be completed.

Without doubt, his being now of a religion, which forbad persecution, under all
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its forms, sharpened his sense of this crime, and may perhaps account for his calling himself the *chief* of sinners; yet, that the persecution of Christians was to him a crime, and that he had sinned in committing it, he could not but know, and is clearly to be inferred from his expression.

All the use he makes of his Jewish persuasion, is, but to palliate something what he knew was without excuse:—*I obtained mercy*, says he, *because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*: that is, because I persecuted in my *unbelieving* state of a Jew, and was kept, by the genius of the Mosaic law, from *knowing* and considering the general malignity of persecution. And that there may be some ground of mercy in this consideration, who can doubt, when we find the Son of God interceding for his very murderers on the same principle—*Father*, says he, *forgive them, for they know not what they do*.

There was this difference, you see, between a Jewish and a Gentile persecutor. The *Jew* was answerable for his not seeing that

Jesus was the Messiah : The *Gentile* was to answer for that ignorance, and for his not seeing the general iniquity of persecution, on account of religion.

Paul, however, was certainly to blame ; nay, he takes much blame on himself, for acting *ignorantly* against the name of Jesus, though his ignorance was of the former kind only.

2. But now another question, and a very important one, arises out of this state of the case. Paul *verily thought* that the religion of Jesus was an imposture. Yet he was *mistaken* in thinking so ; and, what is more, his mistake was highly *criminal*.

What then shall we say to those persons, who affirm, that, provided a man be *persuaded* of the truth of his opinions, he is not answerable for his mistakes ? or, in other words, what becomes of that notion which many have taken up, concerning *the innocency of error in matters of religion* ?

I understand what is generally alledged in support of this candid and conciliating opinion.

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opinion. But the text says expressly, that Paul *verily believed he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus*; and with all this firmness of belief Paul was *the chief of sinners*.

Men therefore conclude too hastily, when from the sole *persuasion* of their sincerity, they infer the innocence of their errors.

“ But what then would you require of poor unhappy man, whose *reason* is naturally so weak, and whose *prejudices* are often so strong ?” Why, to use the force he has; to consider well whether he be indeed sincere (for to be firmly, and to be *sincerely* persuaded, is not always the same thing); to employ his reason, such as it is, with care, and to controul his prejudices, what he can, by an impartial examination.

All this, it will be answered, is already done. It may be so. Let me then have leave to interrogate the sincere rejecter of Christianity, and try his good faith, of which he is so well assured, by the following questions.

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“ Has he cultivated his mind, and furnished himself with the requisite helps for religious inquiry ? Has he studied the sacred volumes with care ? Has he considered their scope and end ? their genius and character ? Has he fixed the boundaries of reason and of faith ? Does he know where the province of the former ends, and where that of the second commences ? Has he studied himself, his faculties and powers, his wants and necessities ? Has he weighed the importance of the search, he is making into the will and word of God ? Has he made that search with a suitable diligence and sobriety ? Has he accustomed himself to the investigation of moral evidence ? Has he collected, compared, and estimated, what is brought in evidence for the truth of the Christian religion ? Has he, in short, (for I address myself to capable inquirers only) omitted none of those means which reason requires, and employed all that industry, and thought, and application, which the sincere love of truth demands on so momentous an occasion ?

“ Still,

“ Still, I have other inquiries to make. Has he approached the sanctuary of religion with awe? Has he purged his mind from all gross, nay from all refined vices? Had he no interest to serve, no prejudice to sooth, no predominant passion to gratify, by a hasty conclusion concerning the truth of Christianity? Or, (not to suspect a philosophic mind of these vulgar illusions) had he no vanity to flatter, no capricious levity to indulge, by a short and disdainful rejection of it? Had he no spleen to divert, no regard of fashion, no partialities of acquaintance or education to mislead him from conviction? Had he no secret wish or hope, which he scarcely durst tell to himself, that his inquiry would end in doubt at least, if not in infidelity? In a word, can he assure himself, that, in these several respects, he had no bias on his mind, or did his best at least to have none, against a conclusion, to which an impartial love of truth might invite and compell him :”

Had St. Paul himself been questioned in this manner, concerning his sincere belief, that he *ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus*, he would hardly, I suppose, have said, that he had fulfilled all these conditions;—But we know what he did say, to himself and to the world: He said, He was THE CHIEF OF SINNERS.

So remote is persuasion from sincerity! and so little acquainted, many times, are *innocence and error*!

But ‘these questions, it will be said, may be retorted on the believer; who may be neither more diligent, nor more impartial in his inquiries, than the unbeliever.’

Allow that they may; yet observe the immense difference of the two cases, in regard both to the *danger* incurred, and to the *crime* committed.

If I *believe*, on insufficient grounds, what do I lose? only what I can well spare; my unbelief and my vices. And what do I gain? that, which of all things is most precious to me; peace of mind, and the hopes

hopes of heaven. On the other hand, if I *disbelieve*, I lose all that is valuable in both worlds, and gain nothing but the sad privilege of being set free from the restraints of this religion ^d.

Consider, too, the difference of the *crime*, in the two cases. If the Christian errs in admitting the truth of his religion, he has only to answer for his ill judgment, at most: he could be drawn to this persuasion by no criminal motives: for, which of these could bias him to the belief of the holiest of all religions? If the error lies on the other side, in rejecting this religion, how shall he know, that, besides the blame of judging ill, some immoral purposes and dispositions may not have secretly concurred to pervert his judgment? The Christian may be un-

^d De se tromper en croyant vraie la religion Chretienne, il n'y a pas grand' chose à perdre : mais quel malheur de se tromper en la croyant fausse !

M. Pascal, p. 225.

reasonable; but the unbeliever, I do not say, certainly, but, is too probably *vicious*.

Thus the danger, in all views, is on the unbelieving side. And if there be difficulty in knowing when I am sincere, there is none in knowing which of the two mistakes is safer and less criminal.

It will be said, perhaps, that an inquirer may be biased in favour of Christianity by corrupt motives, that is, by views of *credit* or *interest*, attending the profession of it, in countries where this religion is legally established. Without doubt. But such persons can hardly put themselves in the case of St. Paul, and say, They are *verily persuaded*, they ought to be Christians. For such gross motives can be no secret to their own hearts, and they cannot but know that Christianity condemns all such motives. I regard then such persons in the light of *hypocrites* confessed, and by no means in that of *believers*. On the other hand, men may *affect* to disbelieve from the like views of *credit* or *interest*, in certain circumstances; and so become

come hypocrites of another kind; of which the number is, perhaps, not inconsiderable. But I am here speaking of such corrupt partialities as may consist with a firm belief, or disbelief of Christianity. And here it is plain, the criminality is likely to be much greater in him who without ground rejects, than in him who too hastily admits such a religion.

To conclude, then, with the case of St. Paul, which has given occasion to these reflexions.

No firmness of persuasion, it is plain, can justify a man in being led by it into the commission of gross and acknowledged crimes. And the reason is, that no persuasion of the truth of any principle can be greater than that which every man has that he ought not to commit such actions. If St. Paul's persuasion saved him from this guilt, it was owing to the peculiar genius of the Jewish religion.

But, further, St. Paul was blameable for taking up that *persuasion*, on which he acted.

His mind had been corrupted by hasty prejudices, and ungoverned passion. He concluded too fast, then, when he thought his persuasion *sincere*, though it was indeed strong and violent. His persuasion did not exclude error, and that error implied insincerity, and so was not *innocent*.

It follows from the whole, that we ought never to *act* wrong on the pretence of conscience; and that we should learn to suspect the possibility of guilt's mixing itself even with what we call our speculative opinions. Error may be innocent; but not so long as truth lies before us, and we may, if we do our duty, discover it. Let our inquiries, then, in all matters of moment, above all in those of religion, be diligent, and strictly honest. Where these precautions are not observed, our mistakes are always blameable, because in some degree they are willful and insincere.

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every man's good word is not likely to
As to this last particular, it is true, the
of all men, is the only one, that we under-
of the text requires, only, that we under-
may not obtain : that is, we only want to
had we, however, deemed a misfortune, we shall
find them, looking in-
S E R M O N VIII.

Preached, May 10, 1767.

St. LUKE, vi. 26.

Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you.

AMONG other *woes* denounced in this chapter by our Saviour against different sorts of men, we have one in the text against *those, of whom all men speak well.*

The reason of this severe sentence may not appear at first sight : first, because it may not immediately occur to us, what hurt or inconvenience there can be in every man's good word ; and, secondly, because
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every man's good word is not likely to be had.

As to this last particular, it is true, the praise of *all men*, in the full extent of the words, is not to be obtained. But the sense of the text requires, only, that we understand a very general praise; and this we see many men obtain: And if we only want to know, in what respects, the possession of this praise can be deemed a misfortune, we shall find them, I suppose, (without looking further) in the following considerations.

The woe, of being *well spoken of by all men*, may be apprehended, if we reflect, That (taking the world as it is) its good word, so largely bestowed on any man, implies *a mediocrity of virtue, at the best*;—that it frequently implies, *a considerable degree of positive ill-desert*;—that it sometimes implies, *a thorough depravity and prostitution of the moral character*.

From these THREE considerations, I propose to illustrate the *woe* of the text.—In moral discourses, it is scarce possible to avoid
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very general assertions. These may sometimes want to be restrained: but ye will do it for yourselves, as ye see cause; for the appeal lies, all along, to your own bosoms and experience.

I. I say then, *first*; that to be *well spoken of by all men*, implies A MEDIOCRITY OF VIRTUE, AT THE BEST;

And the assertion is founded on many reasons. An eminent degree of virtue excites envy; is not generally understood; is unapt to accommodate itself to men's views and expectations; and lastly, is liable to some excesses, and connected with some infirmities, which are either peculiar to itself, or would less disgrace a virtue of the common stamp.

Let us weigh these several reasons.

1. The chapter of *envy* is a common one, and has been exhausted by every moralist. When a man's worth lifts him above the generality of his species, he is thought to depress those who feel themselves beneath him. Their pride is hurt, their self-love

love is mortified, by the acknowledged preference. And in this state of things, no wonder that much industry is employed to obscure a virtue, whose unclouded splendour would give pain.

2. But men sometimes detract from a superior character, with perfect good faith. It is not envy, but *inapprehension*, which sets them on work. For it is with some virtues, as with those sublimer graces in a work of art or genius: few, but such as could have set the example, have any idea or conception of them.

Thus, a disinterested goodness, when carried to a certain length; a generosity of mind, when stretched beyond certain bounds; a sense of honour, operating to a certain degree; in a word, temperance, justice, piety, humanity, any or all of these virtues, exalted to a certain pitch, are either not comprehended, or are perhaps traduced, as marks of folly and extravagance, by those who are not capable of ascending to these heights themselves. Of which, the instances are
so

so frequent in all history, and even in common life, that no man wants to be reminded of them.

3. Still, if superior virtue were only envied, or ill-understood, the misfortune would not be so great. It is, besides, *active, enterprising, constant, and inflexible*. It contents not itself with being merely passive; innoxious, blameless: it would oblige, befriend, and merit of mankind. It would be distinguished by actual services, or at least by glorious attempts. And in prosecuting these, it consults no man's occasions; bends to no man's prejudices; leans to no partial interests or considerations; is simple, uniform, invariable, and holds on its course, steadily and directly, towards its main end and scope. There is a magnanimity in true worth and goodness, which scorns and rejects all disguises, and would appear and be itself.

A character of this stamp is too awful to be popular. There is something of terror in so sublime a virtue; and those who are dis-

distinguished by it, may be esteemed, perhaps, and revered, but are rarely applauded by the world. What difference between the divine integrity of Cato, and the specious temporizing virtues of Cæsar! Yet, if history had been silent, we should easily have known which of these men was destined to be the idol of the Roman people.

4. Nor is even this the worst. Virtue, in this exalted state, is not easily restrained from running, at times, into certain EXCESSES: *excesses*, which spring, as it were, from its very essence, and which the truly wise allow for, excuse, and almost admire; but which hurt the reputation more, with base and ordinary minds, than the virtue itself, under a due exertion, serves and promotes it.

When the virtuous Brutus, in the crisis of the Roman state, struggling for its last breath of liberty, chose rather to put every thing to hazard, than *violate the strict forms of law and justice,*

tice^a.—And again, when our virtuous Falkland was kept, by his nice sense of honour, from *taking some liberties*^b, which the duty of his place, the public service, and the practice of all times, might seem to authorize; when these great men, I say, erred from an excess of virtue, a thousand tongues were ready to blaspheme, and even ridicule their mistakes, while one or two only revered the honesty of mind, which gave birth to them.

These glorious excesses, which are frequent in a virtuous character, hardly deserve the name of infirmities: yet *infirmities*, in the common sense of the word, are the lot of human nature, in whatever state of perfection. That heat of mind, which nourishes heroic virtue, is apt to produce these: and, as the noblest genius sometimes lets fall inaccuracies, which moderate talents

^a Plutarch. BRUTUS.

^b Of opening private letters, and employing spies of state. CLARENDON.

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would correct; so the best man sometimes commits extravagancies, which a moderate virtue would avoid: and when this mischance happens, the infirmity is sure to be observed, and never pardoned. Or, let the weakness be such, as is incident to our common nature; still its effects are very different; it shall eclipse half the virtues of an excellent man, and, in a common character, be either not seen, or not regarded.

So true it is, that, to be *well spoken of by all men*, implies but an ordinary share of virtue, at best! For, consider these several circumstances, and see what a shade they cast on the reputation of extraordinary men. To shine out in the full lustre of a general fame, is reserved for those, *whose virtue is not of a size to give umbrage; whose merits are to the level of all eyes; who adapt themselves with dexterity to all occasions; and who are kept, by their very mediocrity, from any infirmity, or excess.*

2. And it would be well, if the *woe* ended here; if the misfortune of these applauded men

men were negative only, and amounted to no more than the absence of vice, or the possession of virtue in the common degrees. But, I doubt, it amounts to much more: It frequently implies

II. A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF POSITIVE ILL-DESSERT.

When the Jews, in a fit of ignorant zeal, were taking up stones to cast at our blessed Lord, he said to them: *Many GOOD WORKS have I shewed you from my father; for which of THESE works do ye stone me?* Intimating, that the resentment of a misjudging multitude is generally occasioned by praise-worthy actions. On the same principle, when shouts of popular applause are founding in a man's ears, he may reasonably ask, *For which of my EVIL DEEDS is this praise wasted upon me?* For it is just as much to be expected that a clamorous praise should attend a bad action, as that a clamorous rage should be excited by a good one.

^c John x. 32.

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And if we look abroad into the world, we shall find, that it is not virtue, in whatever degree, but some popular vice, that too oft engages its warmest approbation. In fact, even a moderate share of virtue, joined to an inoffensive character, shall more frequently secure a man from the censure, than procure him the applause of mankind. To be generally *well spoken of*, he must do more than not offend: he must merit his reward, before it is conferred upon him. And, though illustrious services may sometimes extort this reward, yet the surer and easier way to obtain it, is to please. And when I am to please *all men*, in order to obtain the suffrage of all, tell me what way there is of executing this project, without dishonouring myself. Men are not pleased, unless I humour their foibles, sooth their vices, serve their ill ends, or unjustifiable passions; and *woe* unto me, if I acquire their good opinion by these means.

But suppose I am restrained by some sense of decency and of duty, and not disposed to
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run all lengths in my endeavours to please. Still it is not nothing, to be silent where virtue bids me speak; it is something, to give a man leave to think he is honoured by me for that which deserves blame; it is base, to flatter and extoll immoderately even his good qualities; and it is flagitious to countenance and inflame his bad ones.

Yet one or other of these ways must he take, who is ambitious of every man's good word. And is there no *woe*, think ye, in such a conduct as this? Suppose I but sacrifice one virtue to my reputation, but one generous quality to my passion for fame; still am I innocent in making this sacrifice? Can I applaud myself for making thus free with my moral character? Or, rather, have I not cause to humble myself under a sense of my ill-desert?

Yes, *woe* to that man, who, to be well with the world, or with any part of it, deserts any one virtuous principle, transgresses any one known duty, corrupts his conscience with any one deliberate vice. Let the

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world's applause be what it will; he is a loser who gains it on such terms.

But I am still putting matters at the best: For,

III. Lastly, this general acceptation, this mighty privilege of being *well spoken of by all men*, sometimes, and not unfrequently, demands a sacrifice, not of one, but all the virtues: it implies A THOROUGH DEPRAVITY AND PROSTITUTION OF THE MORAL CHARACTER.

Our delicacy will not bear to have this matter pushed home, and brought directly to ourselves. Our self-love revolts against the imputation; and no man believes that so severe a censure can suit his own case, or that of his acquaintance.

Let us look abroad, then, for what we are willing to shift off so far from us. Let us look for this opprobrious character in ancient times, and distant regions, with which we may take greater liberties, and concerning which we may discourse without offence.

And

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And when we have found it, let us only remember that the character is no ideal one; that it is fairly taken from the annals of human nature, and may therefore, in part at least, concern ourselves.

A noble Roman is described, by ONE who knew him well, in the following manner ^d :
 “ He possessed, in a wonderful degree, the
 “ faculty of engaging all men to himself,
 “ by every art of address, and the most ob-
 “ sequious application to their humours, pur-
 “ poses, and designs. His fortune, his in-
 “ terest, nay his person, was wholly their’s;
 “ and he was ready to shew his attachment

^d “ Illa in illo homine mirabilia fuerunt, comprehen-
 “ dere multos amicitia, tueri obsequio, cum omnibus
 “ communicare quod habebat, fervire temporibus suorum
 “ omnium, pecunia, gratia, labore corporis, scelere
 “ etiam, si opus esset, et audacia: versare suam naturam,
 “ et regere ad tempus, atque huc et illuc torquere et
 “ flectere: cum tristibus severe, cum remissis jucunde;
 “ cum senibus graviter, cum juventute comiter; cum
 “ facinorosis audacter, cum libidinosis luxuriose vivere.
 “ Hæc ille tam varia multiplicique naturâ, &c. *Cicero pro*
M. Cælio. c. iii.

“ to them by every service, and, if occasion
 “ required it, by every crime. He had the
 “ most perfect dexterity in moulding his
 “ own nature, and shaping it into all forms.
 “ The men of austere morals he could gain
 “ to himself, by a well-dissembled severity;
 “ the more free and libertine sort, by an un-
 “ restrained gaiety. He could equally adapt
 “ himself to the vivacity of youth, and to the
 “ gravity of old age: with men of bold spi-
 “ rits and factious designs, he was prompt,
 “ enterprizing, audacious; with the men
 “ of pleasure, he could be licentious, lux-
 “ urious, dissolute.”

What think ye, now, of this character?
 With so various and pliable a disposition,
 could he fail of being popular? And with
 so total a want of principle, can we doubt
 of his being abandoned? He was, in
 truth, both the one, and the other. He
 was the favourite^e, and the pest of his

^e *Juventus pleraque, sed maximè nobilium, Catilinæ incœptis favebat. Sallust. c. 17. And again: omnino cuncta plebes, Catilinæ incœpta probabat. c. 37.*

country: in a word, this man was, CATILINE.

But let us turn our thoughts from such a prodigy, and conclude only from the instance here given, that a character may be much applauded and very worthless; and that, to be *well spoken of by all*, in a certain extent of those words, one must be, if not a Catiline, yet an unquestionably vicious and corrupt man.

I have now gone through the several topics, I proposed to illustrate in this discourse.

My more *immediate* design was, to explain and justify the text; to shew that it spake not without reason, when it spake, perhaps, somewhat differently from our expectations; and that our divine master had abundant cause to pronounce a *woe* on those, of whom the world is so ready to speak well.

But in doing this, I persuade myself, I have done more; and, in shewing the reasons

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sons of this *woe*, have said enough to repress and mortify that lust of general praise, which is so fatal to our virtue, as well as happiness. For what can be more likely to restrain men from this folly, than to let them see, that the prize, they so ambitiously contend for, would be a misfortune to them, if it could be obtained; since a very general praise is rarely conferred, at best, but upon a feeble imperfect state of virtue; is, frequently, the reward of positive ill-desert; and is, sometimes, the pay, that men receive for the greatest *crimes*.

These considerations shew the only true praise to be that which a well informed mind gives to itself. This praise is pure and unmixed; is only bestowed on real merit; and is nicely proportioned to the several degrees of it. It is the earnest too of every other praise, which ought to be precious to us. For, when conscience approves, good men and angels are ready to applaud: nay, when *a man's heart con-*
demns

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demns him not, then has he confidence towards God'.

To conclude : it is in this contention of human life, as in those games of which the antient world was so fond : the success consists not in the acclamations of the attending multitude, but in the crown which the victor receives at the hands of the appointed judge. If he obtains that great prize, it is of little moment whether the rest follow or not. The applause of the by-standers may add to the noise and pageantry of the day ; but the triumph is sincere and complete without it.

As then it would be arrogance and inhumanity to reject universally the good opinion of the world, so it would be folly, or something worse, to dote upon it. If it may be honestly obtained, it is well : if not, let the friend of virtue ; above all, let the follower of Jesus, console himself,

f 1 John iii. 21.

under

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under the loss of it, with this reflection,
“ That it is no certain argument of true
“ honour and true happiness, nay, that
“ it is a presumption to the contrary, to be
“ found in the class of those, *of whom all*
“ *men speak well.*”

SER-

S E R M O N IX.

Preached Feb. 6, 1774.

St. JOHN viii. 9.

*Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn thee;
Go, and sin no more.*

EVERY one understands the occasion of these words: *The absolution of the woman taken in adultery*, says an antient writer, *has been always famous in the church*^a: Indeed so famous, that some, who know but little of the other parts of the Gospel history, pretend to be well acquainted with this; from which they draw conclusions so favourable to their own loose practices, that others of stricter morals have been disposed to question its authenticity, and to expunge this obnoxious passage from the sacred books.

^a St. Ambrose. Apud Whitby.

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The attempt, indeed, has not succeeded. The obnoxious passage is unquestionably authentick. But what then shall we say to the narrative itself? How are we to expound it consistently with the known character of Jesus? and how are we to obviate the ill consequences which seem so naturally to flow from it?

These questions will be answered by considering attentively the nature and circumstances of the case: from which it will appear, that this decision of our Lord is founded on the highest wisdom; and, when seen in its true light, affords no countenance to the licentious glosses of one party, and needs give no alarm to the scrupulous fears and apprehensions of another.

The fact is related by the sacred historian in these words: “The Scribes and
 “Pharisees brought to him a woman taken
 “in adultery; and when they had set her
 “in the midst, they say to him, Master,
 “this woman was taken in adultery in the
 “very act. Now, Moses in the law com-
 “manded,

“manded, that such should be stoned; but
“what sayest thou?”

Thus far we see there was no difficulty. A crime had been committed, and might be proved; and their law had appointed the punishment. Why then do the Scribes and Pharisees apply to Jesus, for his judgment in the case? The text tells us; for it follows immediately—“This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.” They came to him then, not for any information about the nature of the crime, or of the punishment due to it; the crime had been distinctly specified in their law (the authority of which Jesus admitted, as well as they) and the sort of punishment had been distinctly specified, too: But they came with the insidious design of *tempting him*; that is, of drawing some answer from him, which might give them an occasion to accuse him, either to the people, or to the rulers of the Jewish state.

In what then did their temptation consist? Or, what crime was it, of which,
by

by thus tempting him, they supposed they *might have to accuse him* to the Jews? The answer to this question will lead us into a proper view of our Lord's conduct on this occasion, and will enable us to form a right judgment of the manner in which he disappointed the malice of his insidious tempters.

We find in the preceding chapter of St. John's Gospel, that *the Jews sought to kill him*, ver. 1.; and that, being alarmed at the progress of his doctrine among the people, *the Pharisees and chief priests had even sent their officers to take him by force*, ver. 32. But this project failing in the execution, by the growing favour of the people towards him, and by the strange impression which the doctrine of Jesus had made on those officers themselves, they found it expedient to try other and more indirect methods.

For this purpose, having taken a woman in adultery they supposed they had now obtained a certain method of accomplishing their designs against him. They therefore
bring

bring her to him, and say, *Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now, Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?*

They concluded, that his answer to this question must be such as would give them a sure hold of him. For either it would be, that the law of Moses was too severe; and then, they doubted not but he would fall a sacrifice to the zeal of the people themselves, from whose favour to him they had now the most dreadful apprehensions: or, if he justified this law of Moses, and encouraged the execution of it (and this conduct they had most reason to expect, from the known strictness of his life and doctrine, and from his professed reverence for the law), in that case, they would *have to accuse him* to the Jewish rulers, as taking to himself a civil and judicial character; or, rather to their Roman masters, as presuming to condemn to death an offender by his own proper authority; whereas *it was not lawful* for the Sanhedrim

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itself,

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itself, but by exprefs leave of the Roman governour, *to put any man to death* ^b.

In ſhort, either the people themſelves would kill him on the ſpot, as a diſparager and blaſphemer of the law: or, he would be convicted of that capital crime, which their rulers wanted to faſten upon him, of making himſelf *a king*, and ſo incur the puniſhment of rebellion to the ſtate.

Such being the profound artifice, as well as malice, of this *plot*, the ſituation of our Lord was very critical; and nothing but that divine wiſdom, by which he ſpake, and which attended him in all conjunctures, could deliver him from it.

Let us ſee, then, what that wiſdom ſuggeſted to him in his preſent perilous condition.

Inſtead of replying directly to their enſnaring queſtion, “ He ſtooped down, and “ with his finger wrote on the ground, as

^b John xviii. 31.

“ though

“though he heard them not.” His enemies, no doubt, considered this affected inattention as a poor subterfuge; or, rather, as an evident proof of his confusion, and inability to avoid the snare they had laid for him; and were ready to exult over him, as their certain prey, now fallen into their hands. They therefore repeat and press upon him their insulting question, urging him with much clamour to give them an immediate reply. “So when they continued asking him, as the historian proceeds, he lift up himself, and said to them, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And, again he “stooped down and wrote on the ground.”

The divinity of this answer can never be enough admired. He eluded by it, at once, the two opposite snares, they had laid for him: he disconcerted all their hopes and triumphant expectations; and carried, at the same time, by the weight of this remonstrance, and the power which he gave to it, trouble, confusion and dismay into their

affrighted consciences. Without speaking a word against the law, or taking to himself an authority which he had never claimed, and which did not belong to him, he turned their *temptation* on themselves; and instead of falling a victim to it, astonished them with the moral use he had made of it, and sent them away overwhelmed with shame, conviction, and self-contempt. For it follows, “They which heard [this reply] being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even to the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.”

This was no time, we see, for declaring his sense of the law of Moses, or giving his assent to the execution of it; which, upon the least signification of his mind, had certainly followed from the people (such was their united zeal for the law, and reverence for his opinion). His present purpose and duty was to preserve himself from a captious and malicious question; but in such a manner

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manner as might consist with truth and innocence, and even with a tender concern for the moral state and condition of those questioners themselves.

No man will then expect, that, in such circumstances, he should expatiate, to the bystanders, on the heinous crime of adultery, objected to this unhappy woman: a point, concerning which they deserved not, from any virtuous indignation they had conceived against it, which they wanted not, from any ignorance they were under of its general nature, to be further satisfied or informed. They deserved, and they wanted to be made sensible of their own guilt and wickedness; and of this they derived from Jesus the fullest conviction. This was the sole purport of our Lord's reply to them: any other had been unseasonable and improper; and therefore no man will now be surprized to find the issue of this remarkable conference in the mild dismissal which he gives to the unhappy person, who had furnished the occasion of it.

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“ When

“ When Jesus had lift up himself, and
 “ saw none but the woman, he said to her,
 “ Woman, where are those thine accusers?
 “ Hath no man condemned thee? She said,
 “ No man, Lord: Jesus said to her, Nei-
 “ ther do I condemn thee; go, and sin no
 “ more.”

The story concludes in the very manner we should now expect from the preceding circumstances. The accusers of the woman had withdrawn themselves; being convicted in their own minds, by the divine energy of Christ's reproof, of the very same crime, as some suppose, but certainly of some crime of equal malignity with that, which they had objected to this sinner. Their accusation had not been formed on their zeal for the honour of the law, or any antipathy they had conceived to the crime in question, but on the wicked purpose of oppressing an innocent man. When they failed of this end, they thought not of carrying the criminal before the proper judge, or of prosecuting the matter any further. To the question

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question then which our Lord put to her, *hath no man condemned thee*, i. e. hath no man undertaken to see the sentence of the law carried into execution against thee? she answered, *No man, Lord. Neither do I*, continued Jesus, *condemn thee*: I, who am a private man, and have no authority to execute the law; I, who *came not to judge the world but to save the world*, I presume not to pass the sentence of death upon thee. I leave this matter to thine accusers, and to the proper judge. But what my office of a divine instructor of mankind requires, that I am ready to perform towards thee. Let me admonish thee, then, of thy great wickedness in committing this act, and exhort thee to repentance and a better life for the future; GO, AND SIN NO MORE!

Every thing here is so natural and so proper, so suitable to the circumstances of the case, and to the character and office of Jesus, that no shadow of blame can fall upon our Lord's conduct; nor has any man of sense, who considers the history, the least

reason to conclude that any countenance is hereby given to the horrid sin of adultery. The mistake (if it be purely a mistake) has arisen from the ambiguous sense of the words, I CONDEMN THEE NOT; which may either signify, *I blame thee not*, or *I pass not the legal sentence of death upon thee*. But they cannot be here taken in the former sense, because Christ immediately charges the woman with her guilt, and bids her *sin no more*: Nay, they can only be taken in the latter sense, because that was the sense in which her accusers had *not condemned her*; for otherwise, by bringing her to Jesus, and by their vehement accusation of her, they had sufficiently testified their sense of her crime. When Jesus therefore said, *Neither do I condemn thee*, he could only be understood to mean, “Neither do I take upon me to do that
 “which thine accusers have omitted to do;
 “that is, I do not condemn thee to be put
 “to death; a sentence, which however thou
 “mayest deserve by the law of Moses, I
 “have

“ have no authority to pronounce against thee ?”

It should further be observed, that although the turn here given by Jesus to this famous accusation be indeed favourable to the criminal (and it could not be otherwise, consistently with his own safety, or even duty) yet it insinuates nothing against the propriety of a legal prosecution, nor gives the least countenance to the magistrate to abate of his rigid execution of the law which is entrusted to him. The mixture of mercy and humanity in Christ's decision is indeed very amiable and becoming in a private man ; but had the question been, “ Whether it were not fit to prosecute so great a crime in a legal and regular manner,” there is no reason to believe that his answer would have given any check to the course of public justice.

We see then from the whole narrative, and from this comment upon it, That here is no encouragement given to any man to think more slightly of the sin of adultery, than

than other passages of the Gospel, and the reason of the thing, authorize him to do. The sin is unquestionably of the deepest dye; is one of the most flagrant that men can commit in society; and is equally and uniformly condemned by nature itself and by the Christian morals. If, besides *condemning*, that is, expressing his abhorrence of the sin, as Jesus did, he further made an adulterous multitude sensible of their iniquity and savage inhumanity in calling for the sudden and tumultuary punishment of one, who had deserved no worse, than themselves, this benefit was necessary and incidental to the circumstances of the story; and, while it gives one occasion to admire the address and lenity of our divine master, takes nothing from the enormity of the crime itself, or from the detestation which he had of it. In short, one cannot well conceive how Jesus could have done more in the case, or have expressed his displeasure at the crime more plainly, unless he had become a voluntary and officious informer against the criminal; which, considering

dering the occasion and his own character, no man, I suppose, would think reasonable.

To conclude: if men would call to mind the purity and transcendant holiness of Christ's character, as evidenced in the general tenour of his history, and considered withall, that *never man spake as he spake*, they could not suspect him of giving any quarter to vice; and might be sure, that, if what he said on any occasion, had the least appearance of looking that way, the presumption must be without grounds, and could only arise from their not weighing and considering his words, so replete with all *wisdom*, as well as goodness, with a proper attention. The case before us, we have seen, is a memorable instance of this kind: and let all readers of the Gospel be taught by it, that to understand the Scriptures, and to cavil at them, are different things. Let them be warned by this example, not to impute their own follies to the sacred text, which they must first misinterpret, before they can abuse: And, above all, let them take heed how they
turn

turn the Grace of God into licentiousness; that is, how they seek to justify to themselves, or even palliate, their own corruptions, by their loose and negligent, if not perverse, glosses on the word of God; on that word, by which they must stand or fall; and which, like the divine author of it, will surely in the end be justified in all its sayings, and be clear when it is judged^c.

^c Rom. iii. 4.

SER-

S E R M O N X.

Preached March 1, 1772.

St. MATTHEW xi. 29.

Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: And ye shall find rest unto your souls.

THE moral quality recommended in the text, was little known and less esteemed ^a in the heathen world. Not that *humility*, in the Christian sense of the word,

^a The words ταπεινός, and *humilis*, are observed to be generally, if not always used in a bad sense by the Greek and Latin writers.

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hath no foundation in natural reason : but heathen practice gave no countenance to this Virtue, and the pride of heathen philosophy would make no acquaintance with her.

She was left then to be acknowledged, for the first time, by Jesus of Nazareth, who knew the worth of this modest stranger ; and therefore, as we see, recommends her to the notice and familiarity of his disciples in the most emphatic terms.

One would wonder how a virtue, so advantageously introduced into the Christian world, should be so much neglected by those who call themselves of it. But the reason is not difficult to be explained.

I. It was seen fit, for the ends of human virtue, that, in moulding the constitution of our common nature, a considerable degree of what may be called *a generous pride*, should be infused into it. Man, considered in one view, touches on the brutal creation ; in another, he claims an affinity with God himself. To sustain this nobler part of his

composition, the subject and source of all his diviner qualities, the adorable wisdom of the Creator saw good to implant in him a conscious sense of worth and dignity; that so a just self-esteem might erect his thoughts and endeavours, and keep him from submitting too easily to what the baser half of his nature might exact from him.

Thus far INSTINCT goes: and, as yet, there is no blame. But then to moderate this instinct, (a blind power of itself, and capable of great excesses) to circumscribe its bounds, and direct its energies to their true end, REASON, a much higher faculty, was conferred on man: and his duty, thenceforth, was to give the reins to the natural sentiment, only so far as this supreme arbitress of human life allowed.

And hence his corruption and misery took its rise. He felt the *instinct* draw powerfully; and he would not take, or would not be at the pains to ask, the advice of *reason*, who was ready to tell him how far he might yield to it.

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This wilfulness, or negligence, broke the balance of his moral nature; till *reason*, in this, as in so many other instances, was little regarded; and the instinctive sentiment of *self-esteem*, long since degenerated into lawless pride, was left to domineer as it would; universally, in the Pagan world, and, though checked by this seasonable admonition of our great master, too generally in the Christian.

This is the true account of the first and fundamental reason, which makes *humility* so rare a virtue, and of so difficult practice, even among the disciples of Jesus.

II. A *second* reason is almost as extensive as the former, because founded upon it; I mean, the power of *habit and institution*.

The bias of our minds towards a just self-esteem, not properly directed, presently became *pride*: and pride, from being a general, was easily mistaken for a *natural* principle; which would then, of course, be unconfined in it's operation, and spread it's influence through every quarter of human life.

Hence,

Hence our earliest education is tinged with this vicious self-esteem, and all our subsequent institutions are infected with it. It is cherished in the schools, under the name of emulation; and in the world at large, under that of ambition. Either sex, every age, every condition, is governed by it. The female world are called upon to value themselves; and the male world to assert their own dignity. The young are applauded for shewing signs of spirit; and the old must vindicate themselves from contempt. The lower ranks of men are not to be trampled upon; and the higher, not to be affronted. Our camps encourage it, as the spring of courage: and our courts, as the source of honour.

Thus pride predominates every where: and even the moralist or preacher, who would give some check to this principle, is thought to have an abject mind himself, or not to know that world, which he pretends to inform and regulate.

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What

What wonder then, that this impatient and tyrannical passion, which has general custom, and therefore claims to have reason, on her side, should yield with reluctance even to the authority of religion?

3. *Another* cause, which contributes to the same effect, a partial one indeed, but of no small efficacy, where it prevails, is, perhaps, the *Gothic principle of honour*, deeply interwoven with most of our civil constitutions: a principle, in itself not friendly to Christian humility; but, as confederated with the other two principles before mentioned, what can it do but inflame them both, and give an infinite force to all their operations?

In these three considerations then, we have the true account and history of *pride*, the bane of civil life, and the disgrace of our moral nature. It springs, first, from the *natural sentiment*, easily indulged too far: it is, next, fostered by *general habit*; and, in the end, made sacred by *fashion*. Thus, its tyranny grew up, and is now so complete,
that

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that *lowliness of mind* is ill looked upon even in the Christian world; and her offspring, *meekness*, (the more provoking of the two, as being that virtue drawn forth into outward act) seems in a way to be fairly dismissed from it.

It would hardly serve to reinstate these despised virtues in their pristine honours, to tell of their natures and conditions, to define their properties, and deliver the grounds of reason on which their pretensions are founded. Cold, abstracted philosophy, would do but little in this service. Besides, few persons want to be informed what humility is, or how becoming such a creature as man. And no informations, in the general way of reasoning, could be given with so much precision, but that a willing mind might find a way to mistake or pervert them.

'Tis well then that the text supplies another method of combating the universal pride of mankind. It calls upon us to contemplate, in the person of Jesus, the true and living form of *humility*; and holds out a fo-

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lid, and suitable reward to the votaries of this divine virtue. Would ye know what it is to be *meek and lowly in heart*? *Learn of Jesus*. Do ye ask for what end ye should learn this lesson of him? the answer is direct and satisfactory, *Ye shall find rest to your souls*. These topics, then, must employ what remains of this discourse.

I. The particulars of Christ's humility may be seen at large in the history of his life. But they are summed up by the Apostle Paul in few words.

Let this mind be in you, says he to the Philippians, *which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God* [i. e. was in no haste to seize upon and assert his right of equality with him]; *but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion, as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross*^b.

^b Philipp. ii. 5. 8.

Who,

Who, that hears these words, can have a doubt concerning the nature of humility, or concerning the duties of it? If heaven stooped to earth; if Jesus descended from the dignity, I do not say of an angel, or an archangel, but of God himself, to the abject state of man; if he humbled himself to the lowest condition of that state; veiled all his glories in the form of a servant; in that form administered to our infirmities and necessities; bore all the scorn, the contradiction, the contumely of injurious men; and even submitted himself to death, the ignominious death of the cross, for their sake—If *this mind was in Christ Jesus*, who but must see, that the greatest of mankind may well descend from all his real or fancied eminence, for the service of his brother? may easily forego the little advantage, which his birth, his rank, his wealth, his learning, or his parts, may seem to give him over his fellows, when an act of charity is to be performed by him; when the distresses, the infirmities, nay the vices of humanity may be relieved, and covered, and corrected,

rected, by such condescension? To stoop for such ends is almost pride itself: and to emulate such a pattern, is scarce humility, but glory.

Nor think, that this humility requires of you more than reason requires. You may suppress your pride, without giving up necessary self-defence. Ye may be *meek and lowly in heart*, without being unjust to yourselves, or imprudent. When your essential interests are concerned, ye may assert them with firmness, and even with spirit, in all ways, which good sense allows, or true wisdom recommends. But let not every petty injury, much less any fancied injury, be presently avenged; let not little neglects or discourtesies be hastily resented; overlook many injuries, if not considerable; nay, and many considerable injuries, if they be but tolerable. Think not that your dignity will suffer by such connivance. The true dignity of man, is the performance of his duty. Or, if some indignity be sustained, consider on whose account, and by whose command

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command ye suffer it. Consider, that He, whose dignity was infinitely above yours, submitted to *every* indignity, and for your sake. The authority of your divine master is nothing, if it cannot bind you in any instance to bear his *yoke*: And to what end is the example of your divine Saviour set before you, if ye resolve, on no account, to *take up your cross and follow him*?

But, because our compassionate Lord saw how uneasy this precept would be to the indulged and inveterate pride of his followers, he has therefore condescended to assure them that their obedience to it will, even in this world, be attended with a suitable reward. *Ye shall find rest to your souls.* And this

II. Is the other topic, which I engaged to insist upon, in this discourse.

The great objection to the virtues of *meekness and humility*, is, that the practice of them will put us to some present pain in resisting the impulse of our disordered passions. It

° Matthew xvi. 24.

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will do so. Nature prompts us to repel an injury; and that nature, vitiated and depraved, is in haste to repel it with indignation, and even fury. To give way to the impetuous sentiment, would give us immediate ease; and to suppress it, till the practice becomes habitual, will cost us some throws and agitation of mind. To counteract this instant disquiet, a recompence is proposed, exactly suited to the trial. Our mind is discomposed, for the instant, by the struggle we have to make with the incensed passion: When that is over, it settles again into a full and permanent tranquillity. *We find rest*, as the text speaks, *to our souls*: we have the purest peace within, and have no disturbance of it to apprehend, from without.

I. The uneasiness which *pride* engenders, receives, as I said, some present relief, from the free course of that passion. But see the consequence of giving way to it. Disgust, remorse, fear, and hate, succeed to the indulgence of this fiery sentiment, I mean, when it proceeds so far as to acts of revenge.

But,

But, if it stop short of this extreme, still the mind, by nourishing its resentments, and brooding over the idea of a supposed indignity, hurts its own peace; grows sore and fretful, and suspicious; and, though it be somewhat flattered by the first tumultuous effort of its indignation, which looks like courage and high spirit; yet, the briskness of this sensation soon goes off, and flattens into a sullen gloom of thought, the bane of every selfish, as well as social enjoyment.

It is much otherwise with the *meek and lowly in heart*. They never retaliate injuries, and seldom resent them. They either feel not the stroke of them; or, if they do, the wound is instantly healed by the balsamic virtue of their own minds. But, indeed, a man, well-disciplined in the school of humility, receives but few injuries, for he *suspects* none; it being, I think, true, that, for one real injury done us by others, a hundred such things, as we call by that name, are only bred in our own captious and discontented

tempered imaginations. And then, for those few injuries which he actually receives, they are easily flighted or forgotten by him; because he sees them only in their true shape and size, and not as magnified by an extravagant opinion of his own worth, and as extravagant a contempt of the aggressor. He knows his own infirmities, and can allow for those of other men. If they are petulant or unjust, he, perhaps, has been inobservant or imprudent: besides, he never thought himself entitled to any special respect, and therefore wonders the less, if no great ceremony has been used towards him. To these suggestions of humanity, he adds those of *religion*. He knows what his master enjoins, and he remembers on what terms the injunction is pressed upon him. And thus, though the indignity seem great, he easily excuses one half of it, and forgives the other. The issue is, that he finds *rest* in his own soul, which the proud man never does: so that, as to internal peace, the

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the advantage is clearly on the side of meekness and humility. But then,

II. As to *external peace*, the matter may be thought more problematical. "For that softness of mind, which religion calls *humility*, invites, it is said, and multiplies injuries. Forgive one insult, and you draw upon you a hundred more: so that, if humility be a virtue, it is never likely to be out of breath for want of exercise and employment. In a word, the world is so base, that there is no keeping it in respect, but by *fear*: and how is that needful sentiment to be impressed on the minds of injurious men, in those numberless cases which civil justice cannot reach, but by a quick resentment and personal high spirit?"

Such is the language of those who have learned their ethics of the world, and not of the Gospel. But let us see what there is in the allegation itself.

To connive at one indignity, is, they say, the ready way to invite another. It may be so,

so, in some rare cases, when we have to do with singularly base and ungenerous natures; but even then, I think, chiefly, if not solely, when that connivance is joined with imprudence or folly: and then it is not humility should bear the blame, but our own indiscretion. Besides, the question is concerning a general rule of conduct: and this rule may be a fit and reasonable one, though it admit, as most rules do, of some exceptions.

Again, though a wise and good man will frequently suppress, and always moderate his resentment, yet neither reason nor the religion of Jesus requires, that in no case whatsoever should we be actuated by that principle. The principle itself, as I have shewn, is a natural one, and under due restraint may serve to good purposes; one of which, perhaps, is to give a check to overbearing insolence and oppression, I mean when it rises to a certain degree and exceeds certain bounds. Even our blessed Lord, who was meekness itself, thought fit on some oc-

casions to express a very strong resentment ; as, when he upbraided the Pharisees in no gentle terms, but, in a just indignation at their malice, went so far as to brand them with the bitter names of *vipers and serpents*, and to menace them with the flames of *hell*^a. So that meekness and resentment are not absolutely incompatible ; though the danger of exceeding in this last quality is so great, that the general rule both of reason and Christianity, is to cultivate meekness in ourselves, and to restrain our resentments.

“ But, if exceptions be allowed in any case, the rule, it will be said, becomes of no use ; for that pride and passion will find an exception in every case.” If they should, they must answer for themselves. In all moral matters, something, nay much, must be left to the fairness and honesty of the mind. Without this principle, the plainest rule of life may be evaded or abused : and with it, even that hard saying, of *loving our enemies*, which is near of kin to this of

^a Matth. xxiii. 33.

meekness,

meekness, is easily understood and may be reasonably applied.

“ Still, the rule, it is said, must be an improper one; for that the world, not some few persons, but mankind in general, are only to be kept in order by *force and fear*.” So far as there is truth in this observation, the civil sword, in every country, supplies that needful restraint. But in the general commerce between man and man, in all offices of civility and society, that is, in cases where the stronger passions and more important interests of men are not directly concerned, as they are in what relates to property and power, the observation is clearly not true. Here, pride is the predominant vice of mankind. And pride is naturally softened and disarmed by placability and meekness. The good humour of the world is easily and most effectually maintained by mutual concessions and reciprocal civilities: for pride, having a mixture of generosity in it, yields to these, and loses all the fierceness of its nature. So that they, who bring
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this charge against the world, calumniate their kind, and either shew that they have kept ill company; or, as I rather suspect, have never tried the experiment, which they say is so hopeless. Let them learn to think more favourably, that is, more justly, of human nature. We are passionate, infirm creatures, indeed; but still men, and not fiends. Let them set the example of that *humility*, which they affect to think so unpromising a guard against injuries: and I dare assure them, they will generally find themselves better defended by it, than by any resentment or high spirit which they can possibly exert.

Lastly, I would observe, that, if in some rare instances, and in places, especially, where fashion has made resentment highly creditable, this practice be found inconvenient, the rule is not to be set aside on that account. The authority of the legislator should exact obedience to it; and the inconvenience will be amply compensated by other considerations. We shall have the merit of testifying the sincerity of our religion,

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by giving to God and man so eminent a proof of it; and, in due time, we shall have our reward.

To conclude: in this and all other cases, we shall do well to *learn of Jesus, who was meek and lowly in heart.* His authority, his example, his affectionate call upon us in the words of the text, are powerful motives to the practice of this duty. And for the rest, we have seen, that it leads directly to *peace and quiet* in our intercourse with each other; or, if the perverseness of man should sometimes disappoint us in this expectation, that it will certainly and infallibly *yield rest to our own souls.*

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S E R M O N XI.

Preached April 30, 1769.

LUKE xvi. 14.

*And the Pharisees also, who were covetous,
heard all those things, and they derided him.*

BUT what then were *those things* which our Lord had said in the hearing of the Pharisees, and for which they derided him?

Had he been inveighing against the vice of covetousness in any unreasonable manner? Had he carried the opposite virtue to an extreme, as some moralists have done?

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Had he told the Pharisees that the possession, and much more the enjoyment of riches, was, universally, and under all circumstances, unlawful? Had he pressed it as a matter of conscience upon them, to divest themselves of their wealth, and to embrace an absolute and voluntary poverty? Had he even gone so far as to advise these Pharisees, as he once did a rich man, to *sell what they had and give it to the poor, and then take up the cross and follow him*^a?

Alas, no. He had been saying none of *these things*. He did not think well enough of the Pharisees to give this last counsel of exalted charity to *them*; a counsel, which he had addressed to one whom he loved, to one who was a virtuous man as well as rich, and who wanted only this *one thing*, to make him perfect.

And as for those other precepts, which would have implied, that riches were unlawful in themselves, and the possession of

^a Mark x. 21.

them

them a crime, he was too sober a moralist to address a lecture of this sort to any of his hearers.

The truth is, he had only been advising rich men to employ their wealth in such a way as should turn to the best account, to *make themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*; that is, such friends, as should be able to repay them with interest, and, when these houses of clay are overturned, should *receive them into everlasting habitations*: and, to give this advice the greater weight with them, he had concluded his discourse with saying, that such conduct was even necessary, if they aspired to this reward, for that they *could not serve God and mammon*; that is, they could not serve God acceptably, unless they withdrew their service from *mammon* in all those cases, in which the commands of two such different masters interfered with each other.

Such, and so reasonable was the doctrine which Jesus had been delivering to the Pha-

rifees. And how then could it provoke their *derision*?

The text answers this question—THEY WERE COVETOUS. Their life was a contradiction to this doctrine, and therefore they found it unreasonable, and even ridiculous.

Nor let it be thought, that this illusion is peculiar to avarice. It is familiar to vice of every kind, to scorn reproof; to make light of the doctrine, which condemns it; and, when it cannot confute, to deride the teacher.

So that the text affords this general observation, “That, when the heart is corrupted by any vice, it naturally breeds a disposition to unreasonable mirth and ridicule.”

And, because this levity of mind, in its turn, corrupts the heart still further, it may be of use to open to you, more particularly, *the sources of irreligious scorn*; to let you see from how base an origin it springs; how it rises, indeed, on the subversion of every prin-

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principle, by which a virtuous man is governed, and by which there is hope that a vicious man may be reclaimed.

Now ye will easily apprehend how the sinner comes to cultivate in himself this miserable talent, if ye reflect; *how much he is concerned to avoid the EVIDENCE of moral truth; how insensible he chuses to be to the DIFFERENCES of moral sentiment; how studiously he would keep out of sight the CONSEQUENCES of moral action*: And if ye consider, withal, how well adapted *the way of ridicule* is, to answer all these purposes.

I. FIRST, then, the sinner is much disposed to withhold his attention from *the evidence of moral truth*; and the way of ridicule favours this bad disposition.

When a moral lesson is addressed to us, it is but a common piece of respect we owe the teacher of it; and indeed ourselves, to see what the ideas are of which the doctrine is made up; to consider whether there be a proper coherence between those ideas; whether what is affirmed in the proposition

be consonant to truth and reason, or not. If upon this inquiry we find that the affirmation is well founded, either from our immediate perception of the dependency between the ideas themselves, or from the evidence of some remoter principle, with which it is duly connected, we admit it thenceforth as a truth, and are obliged, if we would act in a reasonable manner, to pay it that regard which may be due to its importance. This is the duty of a rational hearer in the school of instruction : and this, the process of the mind, in discharging that duty, But this work of the understanding, it is plain, requires attention and seriousness ; *attention*, to apprehend the meaning of the proposition delivered to us, and *seriousness*, to judge of its truth and moment.

Indeed, if the result of our inquiry be, that the proposition is unmeaning, or false, or frivolous, we of course reject it, and, perhaps, with some contempt : but then this contempt is subsequent to the inquiry,
and

and would itself be ridiculous, if it went before it.

It is apparent, then, what reason demands in the case. But the precipitancy of the mind is such, that it often concludes before it understands, and, what is worse, condemns what it has not examined. This last folly is more especially chargeable on those who are under the influence of some inveterate prejudice, or prevailing passion. For, when the moral instruction pressed upon us, directly opposes a principle we will not part with, or contradicts an inclination we resolve to cherish, the very repugnancy of the doctrine to our notions or humours creates disgust: and then, to spare ourselves the trouble of inquiry, or to countenance the hasty persuasion that we have no need to inquire at all, we very naturally express that disgust in contempt and ridicule.

I explain myself by the instance in the text. Jesus had said, *Ye cannot serve God and mammon*. The Pharisees, who heard him say this, had taken their resolution,

to serve mammon; and they had, it seems, a principle of their own, on which they presumed to satisfy themselves, that they, likewise, *served God*. Now, this aphorism of our Lord coming against these prejudices, they had not the patience to consider what truth there was in the assertion; what it was *to serve God*, and what it was *to serve mammon*; and what inconsistency there was between these two services. This way of inquiry, which reason prescribes, was too slow for these impatient spirits; and, besides, was contrary to their fixed purpose of adhering to their old principles and practices. They therefore take a shorter method of setting aside the obnoxious proposition. They conclude hastily, that their service of mammon was, some how or other, made consistent with their service of God, by virtue of their *long prayers*. And, for the rest, they condescend not to reason upon the point at all: to get quit of this trouble, or rather, to conceal from themselves, if possible, the deformity

mity of their practice, they slur an important lesson over with an air of negligent railery, and think it sufficient to *deride* the teacher of it.

Ye see then how naturally it comes to pass, that the way of ridicule is taken up by the sinner, to avoid the trouble and confusion which must needs arise from a serious attention to the evidence of moral truth.

II. It serves equally in the next place, to soothe and flatter his corruption, by keeping him insensible, as he would chuse to be, to *the differences of moral sentiment.*

The divine wisdom has so wonderfully contrived human nature, that there needs little more in moral matters, than plainly and clearly to represent any instruction to the mind, in order to procure its assent to it. Whatever the instruction be, whether it affirm this conduct to be virtuous, or that vicious, if the mind be in its natural state, it more than sees, it feels, the truth or falshood of it. The appeal lies directly to the

the heart, and to certain corresponding sentiments of right and wrong, instantly and unavoidably excited by the moral proposition ^b.

It is true, the vivacity of these sentiments may be much weakened by habits of vice; but they must grow into a great inveteracy indeed, before they can altogether extinguish the natural perception. The only way to prevent this sensibility from taking place in a mind, not perfectly abandoned, is to keep the moral truth itself out of sight; or, which comes to the same thing, to misrepresent it. For, being then not taken for what it is, but for something else, it is the same thing as if the truth itself had not been proposed to us. But now this power of misrepresentation is that faculty in which ridicule ex-

^b For it is with propositions, as with *characters*, in relation to which the language of the true moralist is: "Explica, atque excute intelligentiam tuam, ut videas quæ sit in eâ species, forma, et notio viri boni.

Cic. de Off. L. III. c. 20.

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cells. Nothing is easier for it than to distort a reasonable proposition, or to throw some false light of the fancy upon it. The soberest truth is then travestied into an apparent falshood; and, instead of exciting the moral sentiment which properly belongs to it, only serves, under this disguise, to provoke the scorner's mirth on a phantom of his own raising.

The instance in the text will again illustrate this observation.

Had the Pharisees seen, that, *to serve God* implies an universal obedience to all his laws, and that, *to serve mammon* implies an equal submission to all the maxims of the world, and that these laws and these maxims are, in numberless cases, directly contrary to each other, they would then have seen our Lord's observation in its true light; and they could not have helped feeling the propriety of the conduct recommended to them. But the sentiments arising out of this truth, would have given no small disturbance to men, who were determined to act in defiance of them,

them. To avoid this inconvenience, they had only to put a false gloss on the words of Jesus; to suppose, for instance, that by serving God was meant, to *make long prayers*, and by serving mammon, to make a *reasonable provision for their families*; and, then, where was the inconsistency of two such services? In this way of understanding the text, nothing is easier than *to serve God and mammon*. And thus, by substituting a proposition of their own, in the room of that which he had delivered, they escape from his reproof, and even find means to divert themselves with it.

III, But, lastly, a vicious man is not more concerned to obscure the evidence of moral truth, and to suppress in himself the differences of moral sentiment, than he is to keep out of sight *the consequences of moral action*: and what so likely as ridicule to befriend him also in this project.

When the sinner looks forward into the effects of a vicious life, he sees so much misery springing up before him, even in
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this world, and so dreadful a recompence reserved for him in another, that the prospect must needs be painful to him. He has his choice, indeed, whether to stop, or proceed, in his evil course; but, if he resolve to proceed, one cannot think it strange that he should strive to forget, both what he is about, and whither he is going. And, if other expedients fail him, he very naturally takes refuge in a forced intemperate pleasantry. For the very effort to be witty occupies his attention, and gratifies his vanity. A little crackling mirth, besides, diverts and entertains him; and, though his case will not bear reasoning upon, yet a lively jest shall pass upon others, and sometimes upon himself, for the soundest reason.

This is the true account of that disposition to ridicule, which the world so commonly observes in bad men, and sometimes mistakes for an argument of their tranquillity, when it is, in truth, an evident symptom of their distress. For they would forget themselves, in this noisy mirth; just as

children laugh out, to keep up their spirits in the dark.

Let me alledge the case in the text once more, to exemplify this remark.

When our Lord reproved the Pharisees for their covetousness, and admonished them how impossible it was *to serve God and mammon*, the weight of this remonstrance should, in all reason, have engaged their serious attention: and then they would have seen how criminal their conduct was, in *devouring widows houses*, while yet they pretended a zeal for *the house of God*; and being led by the principles of their sect to admit a future existence, it was natural for them, under this conviction, to expect the just vengeance of their crimes.

But vice had made them ingenious, and taught them how to elude this dreadful conclusion. They represented to themselves their reprover in a ridiculous light; probably as one of those moralists, who know nothing of the world, and outrage truth and
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reason in their censures of it: or, they affected to see him in this light, in order to break the force of his remonstrance, and insinuate to the by-standers, that it merited no other confutation than that of neglect. They did, then, as vicious men are wont to do; they resolved not to consider the consequences of their own conduct; and supported themselves in this resolution by *deriding* the person, who, in charity, would have led them to their duty.

Thus it appears how naturally the way of ridicule is employed by those who determine not to comply with the rules of reason and religion. They are solicitous to keep *the evidence of moral truth* from pressing too closely upon them: they would confound and obliterate, if they could, *the differences of moral sentiment*: they would overlook, if possible, *the consequences of moral action*: and nothing promises so fair to set them at ease, in these three respects, as to cultivate that turn of mind, which ob-
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scures truth, hardens the heart, and stupifies the understanding. For such is the proper effect of dissolute mirth; the mortal foe to reason, virtue, and to common prudence.

I have shewn you this very clearly in the case of one vice, the vice of avarice, as exemplified by the Pharisees in the text. But, as I said, every other vice is equally disingenuous, and for the same reason. Tell the ambitious man, in the language of Solomon, that *by humility and the fear of the Lord, cometh honour^c*; and he will loudly deride his instructor: or, tell the voluptuous man, in the language of St. Paul, *that he, who liveth in pleasure, is dead while he liveth^d*; and you may certainly expect the same treatment.

It is not, that vague and general invectives against vice will always be thus received: but let the reproof, as that in the text, be pressing and poignant, let it *come home to*

^c Prov. ii. 4.

^d 1 Tim. v. 6.

men's bosoms, and penetrate, by its force and truth, the inmost foldings and recesses of conscience, and see if the man, who is touched by your reproof, and yet will not be reclaimed by it; see, I say, if he be not carried, by a sort of instinct, to repel your charitable pains with scorn and mockery. Had Jesus instructed the Pharisees *to pray and fast often*; or had he exhorted them, in general terms, to keep the law and to serve God; they had probably given him the hearing with much apparent composure: but when he spoke against *serving mammon*, whom they idolized; and still more, when he told these hypocritical worldlings, that their service of mammon did not, and could not consist with God's service, to which they so much pretended; then it was that they betook themselves to their arms: they *heard these things*, and because *they were covetous*, they *derided* their teacher.

If this be a just picture of human nature, it may let us see how poor a talent that of ridicule is, both in its origin, and applica-

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tion. For, when employed in moral and religious matters, we may certainly pronounce of it, That it springs from vice, and means nothing else but the support of it. Should not the scorner himself, then, reflect on what every other man sees, "That his mirth implies guilt, and that he only laughs, because he dares not be serious?"

But Solomon^e has long since read the destiny of him, who would reprove men of this character. It will be to better purpose, therefore, to warn the young and unexperienced against the contagion of vicious scorn; by which many have been corrupted, on whom vice itself, in its own proper form, would have made no impression. For the modesty of virtue too easily concludes, that what is much ridiculed must, itself, be ridiculous: and, when this conclusion is taken up, reflection many times comes too late to correct the mischiefs of it. Let those, then, who have not yet seated themselves *in the chair of the scorner*, consider, that ridicule is but the last effort of baffled vice to keep itself in coun-

^e Prov. ix. 8.

tenance;

tenance; that it betrays a corrupt turn of mind, and only serves to promote that corruption. Let them understand, that this faculty is no argument of superior sense, rarely of superior wit; and that it proves nothing but the profligacy, or the folly of him, who affects to be distinguished by it. Let them, in a word, reflect, that virtue and reason love to be, and can afford to be, serious: but that vice and folly are undone, if they let go their favourite habit of scorn and derision.

S E R M O N XII.

Preached June 25, 1775.

ECCLESIASTES V. 10.

He that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver.

IF a preacher on these words should fet himself to declaim against silver, he would probably be but ill heard, and would certainly go beside the meaning of his text.

SILVER (or gold) is only an instrument of exchange; a sign of the price which things bear in the commerce of life. This instrument

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ment is of the most necessary use in society. Without it, there would be no convenience of living, no supply of our mutual wants, no industry, no civility, I had almost said, no virtue, among men.

The author of the text was clearly of this mind; since, on many occasions, he makes wealth the reward of wisdom, and poverty, of folly; and since he laboured all his life, and with suitable success, to multiply gold and silver in his dominions, beyond the example of all former, and indeed succeeding, kings of the Jewish state.

The precious metals, then, (both for the reason of the thing, and the authority of Solomon) shall preserve their lustre un sullied, and their honours unimpaired by me. Poets and satirists have, indeed, execrated those, who tore the entrails of the earth for them; and, provoked by the general abuse of them, have seemed willing that they should be sent back to their beds again. But sober moralists hold no such language; and are content

that they remain above ground, and shine out in the face of the sun.

Still (for I come now to the true meaning of my text) good and useful things may be OVER-RATED, or MISAPPLIED; and, in either way, may become hurtful to us. *He, that, in the emphatic language of the preacher, LOVETH silver, certainly offends in one of these ways, and probably in both: and, when he does so, it will be easy to make good the royal denunciation—that he shall not be SATISFIED with it.*

1. Now, wealth is surely over-rated, when, instead of regarding it only as the means of procuring a reasonable enjoyment of our lives, we dote upon it for its own sake, and make it the end, or chief object of our pursuits: when we sacrifice, not only ease and leisure, (which, though valuable things, are often well recompensed by the pleasures of industry and activity), but health and life to it: when we *grieve nature*^a, to gratify this fantastic pas-

^a *Queis humana sibi doleat natura negatis.*

Hor. I. S. i. 75.

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sion; and give up the social pleasures, the true pleasures of humanity, for the sordid satisfaction of seeing ourselves possessed of an abundance, which we never mean to enjoy: above all, when we purchase wealth at the expence of our innocence; when we prefer it to a good name, and a clear conscience; when we suffer it to interfere with our most important concerns, those of piety and religion; and when, for the sake of it, we are contented to forego the noblest hopes, the support and glory of our nature, the hopes of happiness in a future state.

When the false glitter of *silver* (*of which the owner, as Solomon says, has, and proposes to himself, no other good, but that of beholding it with his eyes*^b) imposes upon us at this rate, how should our reasonable nature find any true or solid *satisfaction* in it!

“ But the mere act of acquiring and accumulating wealth is, it will be said, the

^b Eccl. v. 11.

miser's pleasure, of which himself, and no other, is the proper judge; and a certain confused notion of the uses, to which it may serve, though he never actually 'puts it to any, is enough to justify his pursuit of it."

Be it so, then: But is there no better pleasure for him to aim at, and which he loses by following this; and although *a man's ways*, we are told, *be right in his own eyes*^c; yet, is there no difference in them, and do not some of them lead through much trouble to disappointment and *death*? And is there not a presumption, a certainty, that the way of the *miser* is of this sort? when his very name may admonish him of the light in which the common sense of mankind regards his pursuit of untasted opulence; and when he finds, by experience, that his ~~unnatural~~ appetite for it is always encreasing, be the plenty never so great which is set before him. But,

^c Prov. xvi. 25.

2. Wealth may be MISAPPLIED, as well as over-rated, and generally is so, in the most offensive manner, by those, who think there are no pleasures, which it cannot command. For, although the miser has the worse name in the world, yet the spend-thrift (since a certain alliance, which has taken place between luxury and avarice) possibly deserves our indignation more.

But ye shall judge for yourselves. Are not riches, let me ask, sadly misapplied, when, after having been pursued and seized upon, with more than a miser's fury, they are suddenly let go again, on all the wings^d of prodigality and folly? which scatter their precious load, not on modest merit, or virtuous industry, or suffering innocence, but on the flatterers of pride, the retainers of pomp, the panders of pleasure; in a word, on those miscreants, who impeded these harpies, and sent them forth, for the annoyance of mankind.

^d Prov. xxiii. 5.

And

And well are these spendthrifts repaid for their good service. For this profusion brings on more pains and penalties, than I am able to express; disappointment, regret, disgust, and infamy; and not uncommonly, in the train of these, that tremendous spectre to a voluptuous man, *Poverty*: or, if the source, which feeds this whirlpool of riotous expence, be yet unexhausted, and flow copiously, these waters have that baleful quality, that they inflame, instead of quenching, the drinker's thirst. All his natural appetites grow nice and delicate; and ten thousand artificial ones are created, and become more vexatious to him, than any that are of nature's growth. The idolater of riches, the infatuated lover of *silver*, now finds, that the power he serves, the mistress he adores, yields him no other fruit of all his assiduity, but self-abhorrence and distraction; the loss of all virtuous feelings; and numberless clamorous desires, which give him no truce of their importunity, and are incapable, by any gratification, of being quieted and assuaged.

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So true is the observation, that *he, who loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver!* For, either the passion grows upon us, when the object is not enjoyed; or, if it be, a new force is given to it, and a legion of other passions, as impatient and unmanageable as the original one, start up out of the enjoyment itself.

I know the lovers of money are not easily made sensible of this fatal alternative. They think, that this, or that sum, will fill * all their wishes, and make them as rich, and as happy, as they desire to be. But they presently feel their mistake; and yet rarely find out, that the way to content lies through self-command, and that to have enough of any thing which this world affords, we must be careful not to grasp at too much of it.

On the entrance into life, higher and more generous motives usually excite the

* Si hoc est *explere*, quod statim profundas.

Cic. Phil. ii. 8.

better

better part of mankind to labour in those professions, that are accounted liberal. But, as they proceed in their course, interest, which was always one spur to their industry, infixes itself deeply into their minds, and stimulates them more sensibly than any other. It can scarce be otherwise, considering the influence of example; the experience they have, or think they have, of the advantages, that attend encreasing wealth; the fashion of the times, which indulges, or, as we easily persuade ourselves, requires refined, and therefore expensive, pleasures; and, above all, the selfishness of the human mind, which is, and, for wise reasons, was intended to be a powerful spring of action in us.

Thus there are several adventitious, shall we call them? or natural inclinations, which prompt us to the pursuit of riches; and I would not be so rigid, as to insist on the total suppression of them.

Let then the fortune, or the honour (for both are included in the magical word *silver*) which

which eminent worth may propose to itself, be among the inducements which erect the hopes, and quicken the application, of a virtuous man. But let him know withal (and I am in no pain for the effect, which this premature knowledge may have upon him) that the application, and not the object, is that in which he will find his account; just as the pursuit, and not the game, is the true reward of the chase. He who thinks otherwise, and reckons that affluence is content, or grandeur, happiness, will have leisure, if he attain to either, to rectify his opinion, and to see that he had made a very false estimate of human life.

And, now, having thus far commented on my text, I will take leave, for once, to step beyond it, and shew you, in few words (for many cannot be necessary on so plain a subject) *where* and *how* satisfaction may be found.

In the abundance of *silver*, it does not, and cannot lie; nor yet in a cynical contempt of it: but, in few and moderate desires;

fires ; in a correct taste of life, which consults nature more than fancy in the choice of its pleasures ; in rejecting imaginary wants, and keeping a strict hand on those that are real ; in a sober use of what we possess, and no further concern about more than what may engage us, by honest means, to acquire it ; in considering who, and what we are¹ ; that we are creatures of a day, to whom long desires and immeasurable projects are very ill suited ; that we are reasonable creatures, who should make a wide difference between what seems to be, and what is important ; that we are accountable creatures, and should be more concerned to make a right use of what we possess, than to enlarge our possessions ; that, above all, we are Christians, who are expected to sit loose to a transitory world, to extend our hopes to another life, and to qualify ourselves for it.

In this way, and with these reflections, we shall see things in a true light, and shall

¹ Quid sumus, et quidnam victuri gignimur. Persius.
either

either not desire abundant wealth, or shall understand its true value. The strictest morality, and even our divine religion, lays no obligation upon us to profess poverty. We are even required to be industrious in our several callings and stations, and are, of course, allowed to reap the fruits, whatever they be, of an honest industry. Yet it deserves our consideration, that wealth is always a snare, and therefore too often a curse; that, if virtuously obtained, it affords but a moderate satisfaction at best; and that, if we will be rich, that is, resolve by any means, and at all events, to be so, we *pierce ourselves through with many sorrows*^s; that it even requires more virtue to manage, as we ought, a great estate, than to acquire it, in the most reputable manner; that affluent, and, still more, enormous wealth secularizes the heart of a Christian too much, indisposes him for the offices of piety, and too often (though it may seem strange) for those

^s 1 Tim. vi. 9.

of

of humanity; that it inspires a sufficiency and self-dependance, which was not designed for mortal man; an impatience of complying with the rules of reason, and the commands of religion; a forgetfulness of our highest duties, or an extreme reluctance to observe them.

In a word, when we have computed all the advantages, which a flowing prosperity brings with it, it will be our wisdom to remember, that its disadvantages are also great^h; greater than surely we are aware of, if it be true, as our Lord himself assures us it is; *that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of Heaven*ⁱ.

Yet, *with God* (our gracious master adds) *all things are possible*. I return, therefore, to the doctrine with which I set out, and conclude; that riches are not evil in themselves; that the moderate desire of them is not un-

*Ardua res hæc est, opibus non tradere mores,
Et cùm tot Cræsos viceris, esse Numam.*

Martial, xi. vi.

ⁱ Matth. xix. 23.

lawful; that a right use of them is even meritorious. But then you will reflect on what the nature of things, as well as the voice of Solomon, loudly declares, that *he, who loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver*; that the capacity of the human mind is not filled with it; that, if we pursue it with ardour, and make it the sole or the chief object of our pursuit, it never did, and never can yield a true and permanent satisfaction; that, if *riches encrease*, it is our interest, as well as duty, *not to set our hearts upon them*^k; and that, finally, we are so to employ the riches, we any of us have, with temperance and sobriety, with mercy and charity, as to *make ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness* (of the mammon, which usually deserves to be so called) that, *when we fail* (when our lives come, as they soon will do, to an end) *they may receive us into everlasting habitations*^l.

^k Ps. lxxii. 10.

^l Luke xvi. 9.

S E R M O N XIII.

Preached Feb. 21, 1773.

I COR. VI. 20.

Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

THE words, as the expression shews, are an inference from the preceding part of the Apostle's discourse. The occasion was this. He had been reasoning, towards the close of this chapter, against fornication, or the vice of impurity; to which the Gentiles, in their unbelieving state, had been notoriously addicted; and for which the Corinthians (to whom he writes) were even, among the Gentiles themselves, branded to a proverb.

The topics, he chiefly insists upon, are taken, not from nature, but the principles of our holy religion, from the right and property, which God hath in Christians. By
virtue

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virtue of their profession, their bodies and souls are appropriated to him. THEREFORE, says he, *glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

To apprehend all the force of this conclusion, it will be proper to look back to the arguments themselves; to consider distinctly the substance of them, and the manner in which they are conducted.

This double attention will give us cause to admire, not the logick only, but the address, of the learned Apostle. I say, the *address*; which the occasion required: for, notwithstanding that no sin is more opposite to our holy religion, and that therefore St. Paul, in his epistles to the Gentile converts, gives it no quarter, yet, as became the wisdom and sanctity of his character, he forgets not of what, and to whom, he writes.

The vice itself is of no easy reprehension: not, for want of arguments against it, which are innumerable and irresistible; but from the reverence which is due to one's self and others. An Apostle, especially, was to respect his own dignity. He was, besides,

neither to offend the innocent, nor the guilty. Unhappily, these last, who needed his plainest reproof, had more than the delicacy of innocence about them, and were, of all men, the readiest to take offence. For so it is, the licentious of all times have feared consciences, and tender apprehensions. It alarms them to hear what they have no scruple to commit.

The persons addressed were, especially, to be considered. These were Corinthians: that is, a rich commercial people, voluptuous and dissolute. They were, besides, wits and reasoners, rhetoricians and philosophers; for under these characters they are represented to us. And all these characters required the Apostle's attention. As a people addicted to pleasure, and supported in the habits of it by abounding wealth, they were to be awakened out of their lethargy, by an earnest and vehement expostulation: as pretending to be expert in the arts of reasoning, they were to be convinced by strict argument: and, as men of

quick rhetorical fancies, a reasoner would find his account in presenting his argument to them through some apt and lively image.

Let us see, then, how the Apostle acquits himself in these nice circumstances.

After observing that the sin he had warned the Corinthians to avoid, was *a sin against their own body*; that is, was an abuse and defilement of it, he proceeds, "*What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God? And ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*"

The address, we see, is poignant; the reasoning, close; and the expression, oratorical. The vehemence of his manner could not but take their attention: his argumentation, as being founded on Christian principles and ideas, must be conclusive to the persons addressed; and, as conveyed in remote and decent figures, the delicacy of their imaginations is respected by it.

The whole deserves to be opened and explained at large. Such an explanation, will be the best discourse I can frame on this subject.

I. First, then, the Apostle asks, *What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?*—This question refers to that great Christian principle, that we live *in the communion of the Holy Ghost*^a; not, in the sense in which we *all live and move and have our being in God*; but in a special and more exalted sense; the gospel teaching, that *God hath given to us Christians the Holy Spirit*^b, to be with us, and in us; to purify and comfort us: that we are *baptized by this spirit*^c, sanctified, *sealed by it to the day of redemption*^d.

Now this being the case, the *body* of a Christian, which the Holy Ghost inhabits and sanctifies by his presence, is no longer

^a 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

^b 1 Thess. iv. 8.

^c Acts xi. 16.

^d Eph. i. 13.

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to be considered as a worthless fabrick, to be put to sordid uses, but as the receptacle of God's spirit, as the place of his residence; in a word, as his TEMPLE and sanctuary.

The figure, you see, presents an idea the most august and venerable. It carried this impression with it both to the Gentile and Jewish Christians. It did so to the Gentiles, whose superstitious reverence for their idol-temples is well known; and though many an abominable rite was done in them, yet the nature of the deity, occupying this temple, which was the Holy Ghost, put an infinite difference between him and their impure deities, the impurest of which had engrossed the Corinthian worship. So that this contrast of the object could not but raise their ideas, and impress the reverence, which the Apostle would excite in them for such a temple, with full effect on their minds^e.

^e It was the easier to do this, as the Heathens had their Minerva and Diana, as well as grosser deities; and their vestal virgins too; though, I doubt, in less numbers than the shameless votaries of the Corinthian Venus.

See STRABO L. viii. p. 378. Par. 1620.

And then to Jews, the allusion must be singularly striking: for their supreme pride and boast was, the temple at Jerusalem, *the tabernacle of the most high, dwelling between the cherubims, and the place of the habitation of God's glory*^f.

To both Jew and Gentile, the notion of a temple implied these two things, 1. That the divinity was in a more especial manner present in it: and, 2. That it was a place peculiarly set apart for his service. Whence the effect of this representation would be, That the body, having the Holy Spirit lodged within it, was to be kept pure and clean for this cælestial inhabitant: and, as being dedicated to his own use, it was not to be prophaned by any indecencies, much less by a gross sin, which is, emphatically, *a sin against the body*, and by heathens themselves accounted a *pollution*^g of it.

^f Ps. xlvi. 4.—lxxx. 1.—xxvi. 8.

^g Nullis POLLUITUR casta domus stupris.—HOR.

Cum castum amisit POLLUTO CORPORE florem.

CATUL.

Further;

Further; the Apostle does not leave the Corinthians to collect all this from the image presented to them, but asserts it expressly: *What! know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, WHICH IS IN YOU:* Implying, that what they would naturally infer from their idea of a temple, was true, in fact, *that the Holy Ghost was in them;* that his actual occupancy and possession of their bodies appropriated the use of them to himself, and excluded all sordid practices in them, as prophane and SACRILEGIOUS. Nay, he further adds; AND WHICH [Holy Ghost] YE HAVE OF GOD: ye have received this adorable spirit, *which is in you,* from God himself; and so are obliged to entertain this heavenly guest with all sanctity and reverence; not only for his own sake, and for the honour he does you in dwelling in you, but for his sake who sent him, and from whose hands ye have received him.

This first argument, then, against the sin of uncleanness, divested of its figure, stands thus. In consequence of your Christian profession,

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feſſion, ye muſt acknowledge, that the Holy Spirit is given to inform and conſecrate your mortal bodies; that he is actually *within* you; and that he dwells and operates there, by the gracious appointment and commiſſion of God. Ye are therefore to conſider your body as the place of his more eſpecial habitation; and as ſuch, are bound to preſerve it in ſuch purity, as the nature of ſo ſacred a preſence demands.

This is the clear, obvious, and concluſive argument; liable to no objection, or even cavil, from a profeſſor of Chriſtianity. The figure of a temple is only employed to raiſe our apprehenſions, and to convey the concluſion with more force and energy to our minds. But now,

II. The Apoſtle proceeds to another and diſtinct conſideration, and ſhews that the Holy Ghoſt is not only the actual *occupier and poſſeſſor* of the body of Chriſtians, whom the Almighty had, as it were, forced upon them, and by his ſovereign authority enjoined them to receive, but that he was the true
and

and rightful PROPRIETOR of it. YE ARE NOT YOUR OWN, continues the Apostle; not merely, as “ God hath, by his spirit, taken possession of you, and sealed you up, as “ his own proper goods^h;” but as he hath redeemed and purchased you, as he hath done that, by which the *property* ye might before seem to have in your bodies, is actually made over and consigned to him. FOR YE ARE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE.

The expression is, again, figurative; and refers to the notions and usages that obtained among the heathens, the Greeks especially, in regard to *personal slavery*. As passionate admirers, as they were, of liberty, every government, even the most republican, abounded in slaves; every family had its share of them. The purchase of them, as of brute beasts, was a considerable part of their traffick. Men and women were bought and sold publicly in their markets: the wealth of states and of individuals, in great measure, consisted in them. Thus was hu-

^h Dr. Whitby on the place.

man nature degraded by the Heathen, and I wish it might be said, by heathens only. But my present concern is with them. It is too sad a truth that human creatures sold themselves, or were sold by their masters, to be employed in the basest services, even those of luxury and of lust. This infamous practice was common through all Greece, but was more especially a chief branch of the Corinthian commerce. Their city was the head-quarters of prostitution, and the great market for the supply of it.

Now to this practice the Apostle alludes, but in such a manner as implies the severest reproof of it. His remonstrance is to this effect. “ Ye Corinthians, in your former
“ pagan state, made no scruple to consider
“ your slaves as your own absolute property.
“ Your pretence was, that *ye had bought*
“ *them with a price*; that is, with a piece
“ of money, which could be no equivalent
“ for the natural inestimable liberty and dig-
“ nity of a fellow creature; yet ye claimed
“ to yourselves their entire, unreserved ser-
“ vice;

“ vice ; and often condemned them to the
 “ vilest and most ignominious.

“ To turn now, says the Apostle, from
 “ these horrors to a fairer scene ; for I take
 “ advantage only of your ideas in this mat-
 “ ter, to lead you to just notions of your
 “ present Christian condition. God, the
 “ sole rightful proprietor of the persons of
 “ men, left you in the state of nature, to
 “ the enjoyment of your own liberty, with
 “ no other restraint upon it than what was
 “ necessary to preserve so great a blessing,
 “ the restraint of reason. Now, indeed, but
 “ still for your own infinite benefit, he
 “ claims a stricter property in you, and de-
 “ mands your more peculiar service. He
 “ first made you men, but now Christians.
 “ Still he condescends to proceed with you
 “ in your own way, and according to your
 “ own ideas of right and justice. *He has*
 “ *bought you with a price :* but, merciful
 “ heaven, with *what* price ? With that,
 “ which exceeds all value and estimation,
 “ with

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“ with the BLOOD of his only begotten Son;
 “ the least drop of which is of more virtue
 “ than all your hecatombs, and more pre-
 “ cious than the treasures of the East.
 “ And for what was this price paid? Not
 “ to enslave, much less to insult and cor-
 “ rupt you (as ye wickedly served one ano-
 “ ther), but to *redeem you into the glorious*
 “ *liberty of the sons of God*: It was, to re-
 “ store you from death to life, from servi-
 “ tude to freedom, from corruption to ho-
 “ linefs, *to make to himself a peculiar people,*
 “ *zealous of good works*. Say, then, Is this
 “ ransom an equivalent for the purchase of
 “ you? And is the end for which ye are
 “ purchased, such as ye dare complain of,
 “ or have reason to refuse? Henceforth,
 “ then, *ye are not your own*: the property of
 “ your souls and bodies is freely, justly, equi-
 “ tably, with immense benefit to yourselves,
 “ and unspeakable mercy on the part of the
 “ purchaser, transferred to God. Your
 “ whole and best service is due to him, of
 “ strict right: what he demands of you is
 “ to

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“ to serve him in all virtue and godliness
 “ of living, and particularly to respect
 “ and reverence yourselves; in a word,
 “ not to pollute yourselves with forbidden
 “ lusts. In this way ye are required to serve
 “ your new lord and master, who has the
 “ goodness to regard such service, as an ho-
 “ nour and glory to himself. *Therefore,*
 “ do your part inviolably and conscienti-
 “ ously, *Glorify God in your body, and in*
 “ *your spirit, which are Gods.*”

This is the Apostle's idea, when drawn out and explained at large. The reasoning is decisive, as in the former case: and the expression admirably adapted to the circumstances of the persons addressed. In plain words, the argument is this. God has provided, by the sacrifice of the death of Christ, for your redemption from all iniquity, both the service, and the wages of it. By your profession of Christianity, and free acceptance of this inestimable benefit, freely offered to you, ye are become in a more especial

pecial manner, his servants: ye are bound, therefore, by every motive of duty and self-interest to preserve yourselves in all that purity of mind and body, which his laws require of you; and for the sake of which ye were taken into this nearer relation to himself. The figure of being *bought with a price*, was at once the most natural cover of this reasoning, as addressed to the Corinthian Christians; and the most poignant reproof of their country's inhuman practice of trafficking in the bodies and souls of men.

The force both of the *figure* and the *reasoning* is apparently much weakened by this minute comment upon the Apostle's words, which yet seemed necessary to make them understood.

To draw to a point, then, the substance of what has been said, and to conclude.

The vice which the Apostle had been arguing against, is condemned by natural reason. But Christians are bound by additional and peculiar considerations to abstain
from

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from it. YE, says the Apostle, ARE THE TEMPLES OF THE HOLY GHOST. To defile yourselves with the sins of uncleanness is, then, to desecrate those bodies which the Holy Ghost sanctifies by his presence. It is, in the emphatic language of scripture, *to grieve the holy spirit,* and *to do despite to the spirit of grace.* It is like, nay it is infinitely worse, than polluting the sanctuary: an abomination, which nature itself teaches all men to avoid and execrate. It is, in the highest sense of the words, PROPHANENESS, IMPIETY, SACRILEGE.

Again; YE ARE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE: ye are not your own, but God's; having been ransomed by him, your souls and bodies, when both were lost, through the death of his son: a price, of so immense, so inestimable a value, that worlds are not equal to it. To dispose of yourselves, then, in a way which he forbids and abhors; to corrupt by your impuri-

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ties

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ties that which belongs to God, which is his right and property; to serve your lusts, when ye are redeemed at such a price to serve God only, through Jesus Christ; is an outrage which we poorly express, when language affords no other names for it, than those of INGRATITUDE, INFIDELITY, INJUSTICE.

Whatever excuses a poor heathen might alledge to palliate this sin, we Christians have none to offer. He, *who knew not God*, might be led by his pride, by his passions, and even by his religion, to conclude (as the idolatrous Corinthians seem to have done) that *his own body was for fornication*; or, at most, that he was only accountable to *his own soul* (if his philosophy would give him leave to think he had one) for the misuse of it. But this language is now out of date. The souls and bodies of us Christians are not our's, but the *Lord's*: they are *occupied* by his spirit, and *appropriated* to his service.

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vice. The conclusion follows, and cannot be enforced in stronger terms than those of the text: **THEREFORE GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY AND IN YOUR SPIRIT, WHICH ARE GOD'S.**

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S E R M O N XIV.

Preached March 13, 1774.

JOB xxiii. 26.

*Thou writest bitter things against me, and
makest me to possess the iniquities of my
youth.*

THIS is one of the complaints which Job makes in his expostulations with the Almighty. He thought it hard measure that he should suffer, now in his riper years, for the iniquities of his youth. He could charge himself with no other; and therefore he hoped that these had been forgotten.

Job is all along represented as an eminently virtuous person; so that the iniquities of his

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his youth might not have been numerous or considerable: otherwise, he would not have thought it strange, that he was *made to possess* his sins, long after they had been committed. Our experience is, in this respect, so constant and uniform, that there is no room for surprize or expostulation. All those who have passed their youth in sin and folly, may with reason express a very strong resentment against themselves; but have no ground of complaint against God, when they cry out, in the anguish of their souls: *Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.*

The words are peculiarly strong and energetic; and may be considered distinctly from the case of Job, as expressing this general proposition; "That, in the order of things, an ill-spent youth derives many lasting evils on the subsequent periods of life." An alarming truth! which cannot be too much considered, and should espe-

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cially be set before the young and unexperienced, in the strongest light.

The sins of *youth*, as distinguished from those of riper years, are chiefly such as are occasioned by an immoderate, or an irregular pursuit of pleasure; into which we are too easily carried in that careless part of life; and the ill effects of which are rarely apprehended by us, till they are severely felt.

Now, it may be said of us, that we are made to POSSESS these sins, “*When we continue under the constant sense and unrepented guilt of them:*” “*When we labour under tyrannous habits, which they have produced:*” And, “*when we groan under afflictions of various kinds, which they have entailed upon us.*”

In these three respects, I mean to shew how *bitter those things are, which God writeth*, that is, decreeth in his justice, *against the iniquities of our youth.*

I. The *first*, and bitterest effect of this indulgence in vicious pleasure, is the guilt and
con-

consequent remorse of conscience, we derive from it.

When the young mind has been tinctured in any degree with the principles of modesty and virtue, it is with reluctance and much apprehension, that it first ventures on the transgression of known duty. But the vivacity and thoughtless gaiety of that early season, encouraged by the hopes of new pleasure, and sollicitated, as it commonly happens, by ill examples, is at length tempted to make the fatal experiment; by which guilt is contracted, and the sting of guilt first known. The ingenuous mind reflects with shame and compunction on this miscarriage: but the passion revives; the temptation returns, and prevails a second time, and a third; still with growing guilt, but unhappily with something less horror; yet enough to admonish the offender of his fault, and to embitter his enjoyments.

As no instant mischief, perhaps, is felt from this indulgence, but the pain of remorse, he, by degrees, imputes this effect

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to an over-timorous apprehension, to his too delicate self-esteem, or to the prejudice of education. He next confirms himself in these sentiments, by observing the practice of the world, by listening to the libertine talk of his companions, and by forming, perhaps, a sort of system to himself, by which he pretends to vindicate his own conduct: till, at length, his shame and his fears subside; he grows intrepid in vice, and riots in all the intemperance to which youth invites, and high spirits transport him.

In this delirious state he continues for some time. But presently the scene changes. Although the habit continue, the enjoyment is not the same: the keenness of appetite abates, and the cares of life succeed to this run of pleasure.

But neither the cares nor the pleasures of life can now keep him from reflection. He cannot help giving way, at times, to a serious turn of thought; and some unwelcome event or other will strike in to promote it. Either the loss of a friend makes him

him grave; or a fit of illness sinks his spirits; or it may be sufficient, that the companions of his idle hours are withdrawn, and that he is left to himself in longer intervals than he would chuse, of solitude and recollection.

By some or other of these means CONSCIENCE revives in him, and with a quick repentment of the outrage she has suffered. Attempts to suppress her indignant reproaches, are no longer effectual: she *will* be heard; and her voice carries terror and consternation with it.

“ She upbraids him, first, with his loss of virtue, and of that which died with it, her own favour and approbation. She then sets before him the indignity of having renounced all self-command, and of having served ingloriously under every idle, every sordid appetite. She next rises in her remonstrance; represents to him the baseness of having attempted unsuspecting innocence; the cruelty of having alarmed, perhaps destroyed, the honour of deserving families; the

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the fraud, the perfidy, the perjury, he has possibly committed in carrying on his iniquitous purposes. The mischiefs he has done to others are perhaps not to be repaired; and his own personal crimes remain to be accounted for; and, if at all, can only be expiated by the bitterest repentance. And what then, concludes this severe monitor in the awful words of the Apostle, *What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death*^a."

Suppose now this remonstrance to take effect, and that the sinner is at length (for what I have here represented in few words, takes much time in doing; but suppose, I say, that the sinner is at length) wrought upon by this remonstrance to entertain some serious thoughts of amendment, still the consciousness of his ill desert will attend him through every stage of life, and corrupt the sincerity of all his enjoyments; while he knows not what will be the issue of his crimes, or whether, indeed, he shall ever

^a Rom. vi. 21.

be able truly and effectually to repent of them. For we cannot get quit of our sins, the moment we resolve to do so: But, as I proposed to shew,

II. *In the second place*, we are still made to possess the iniquities of our youth, *while we labour under any remains of those tyrannous habits, which they have produced in us.*

There is scarce an object of greater compassion, than the man who is duly sensible of his past misconduct, earnestly repents of it, and strives to reform it, but yet is continually drawn back into his former miscarriages, by the very habit of having so frequently fallen into them. Such a man's life is a perpetual scene of contradiction; a discordant mixture of good resolutions, and weak performances; of virtuous purposes, and shameful relapses; in a word, of sin and sorrow. And, were he only to consult his present ease, an uninterrupted course of vice might almost seem preferable to this intermitting state of virtue. But the misery of this condition comes from himself, and must
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be endured, for the sake of avoiding, if it may be, one that is much worse. In the mean time he feels most sensibly what it is to *possess* the iniquities of his youth. The temptation, perhaps, to persevere in them, is not great; he condemns, and laments his own weakness. Still the habit prevails, and his repentance, though constantly renewed, is unable to disengage him from the power of it.

Thus he struggles with himself, perhaps for many years, perhaps for a great part of his life; and in all that time is distracted by the very inconsistency of his own conduct, and tortured by the bitterest pains of compunction and self-abhorrence.

But let it be supposed, that the grace of God at length prevails over the tyranny of his inveterate habits; that his repentance is efficacious, and his virtue established. Yet the memory of his former weakness fills him with fears and apprehensions: he finds his mind weakened, as well as polluted, by his past sins; he has to strive against the
returning

returning influence of them ; and thus, when penitence and tears have washed away his guilt, he still thinks himself insecure, and trembles at the possible danger of being involved again in it.

Add to all this, the compunction which such a man feels, when he is obliged to discountenance in others, perhaps, by his station, to punish those crimes in which he had so long and so freely indulged himself : and how uneasy the very discharge of his duty is thus rendered to him.

To say all upon this head : his acquired habits, if not corrected in due time, may push him into crimes the most atrocious and shocking ; and, if subdued at length, will agitate his mind with long dissatisfaction and disquiet. Repentance, if it comes at all, will come late ; and will never reinstate him fully in the serenity and composure of his lost innocence. But,

III. Lastly, when all this is done (and more to do is not in our power) we may still possess the iniquities of our youth, in another

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ther sense, I mean, *when we groan under the temporal afflictions of many kinds, which they entail upon us.*

So close do these sad *possessions* cleave to us, and so difficult it is, contrary to what we observe of all other possessions, to divest ourselves of them !

When PLEASURE first spread its snare for the young voluptuary, how little did he suspect the malignity of its nature, and that under so enchanting an appearance, it was preparing for him pains and diseases, declining health, an early old-age, perhaps poverty, infamy, and irreparable ruin ? Yet some, or all of these calamities may oppress him, when the pleasure is renounced, and the sin forsaken.

Youth and health are with difficulty made to comprehend how frail a machine the human body is, and how easily impaired by excesses. But effects will follow their causes ; and intemperate pleasure is sure to be succeeded by long pains, for which there is

no

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no prevention, and for the most part, no remedy. Hence it is that life is shortened; and, while it lasts, is full of languor, disease, and suffering. If by living *fast*, as men call it, they only abridged the duration of their pleasures, their folly might seem tolerable. But the case is much worse: they treasure up to themselves actual sufferings, from disorders which have no cure, as well as no name. And not unfrequently it happens, according to the strong expression in the book of Job, that *a man's bones are full of the sin of his youth, till they lie down with him in the grave*^a.

Or, if health continue, his *fortune* suffers; it being an observation as old as Solomon, and confirmed by constant experience ever since, that *he who loveth pleasure, shall not be rich*^b. His paternal inheritance is perhaps wasted, or much reduced. And his careless youth has lost the opportunity of

^a Job. xx. 11.

^b Prov. xxi. 17.

those

those improvements which should enable him to repair it. Or, if the abundant provision of wiser ancestors secure him from this mischance; or, if he has had the discretion to mix some industry and œconomy with his vices, still his good name is blasted, and so tender a plant as this is not easily restored to health and vigour. For it is a mistake to think that intemperance leaves no lasting disgrace behind it. The contrary is seen every day; and the crimes which we commit in the mad pursuit of pleasure, bring a dishonour with them, which no age can wholly outlive, and no virtue can repair^b. It stuck close to Cæsar himself in his highest fortune: All his laurels could neither hide his *baldness* from the observation of men, nor the infamy of that commerce by which it had been occasioned^c.

^b The poet says well of such *stains*, as these;

Impressæ resident nec eluentur. CATULL.

^c SUET. J. Cæsar, c. 45.

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All this, it may be thought, is very hard. But such is the fact, and such the order of God's providence. We have not the making of this system; it is made to our hands by him who ordereth all things for the best, how grievous soever his dispensations may sometimes appear to us. Our duty, and our wisdom is to reflect what that system is, and to conform ourselves to it.

If a young man, on his entrance into life, could be made duly sensible of the dreadful evils, which, in the very constitution of things, flow from vice, there is scarcely any temptation that could prevail over his virtue. But his levity and inexperience expose him to these evils: he thinks nothing of them till they arrive, and then there is no escape from them.

To conclude: if any thing can rescue unwary youth out of the hands of their own folly, it must be such a train of reflection as the text offers to us. Let it sink deep into their minds, that there are indeed *bitter things* decreed against the iniquities of that early

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age;

age; that a thousand temporal evils spring from that source; that vicious habits are in themselves vexatious and tormenting; and, that, uncorrected, and unrepented of, they fill the mind with inutterable remorse and horror.

When the sins of youth are seen in this light, it is not by giving them the soft name of infirmities, or by cloathing them with ideas of pleasure, that we shall be able to reconcile the mind to them. Such thin disguises will not conceal their true forms and natures from us. We shall still take them for what indeed they are, for forcerers and assassins, the enchanters of our reason and the murderers of our peace.

The sum of all is comprised in that memorable advice of the Psalmist, so often quoted in this place (and, for once, let it have its effect upon us): *Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last.*

* Pf. xxxvii. 38.

Or,

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Or, if the scorner will not listen to this advice, it only remains to leave him to his own sad experience; but not till we have made one charitable effort more to provoke his attention by the caustic apostrophe of the wise man: *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but KNOW THOU, that, for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment* ^d.

^d Eccles. c. xi. 9.

S E R M O N XV.

Preached May 28, 1769.

ECCLESIASTES vii. 21, 22.

*Take no heed unto all words that are spoken,
lest thou hear thy servant curse thee. For
oftentimes, also, thine own heart knoweth,
that thou thyself, likewise, hast cursed others.*

THE royal author of this book has been much and justly celebrated for his wise aphorisms and precepts on the conduct of human life. Among others of this sort, the text may deserve to be had in reverence; which, though simply and familiarly expressed, could only be the reflection of a man who had great experience of the world,

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world, and had studied with care the secret workings of his own mind.

The purpose of it is, to disgrace and discountenance that ANXIOUS CURIOSITY (the result of our vanity, and a misguided self-love) which prompts us to inquire into the sentiments and opinions of other persons concerning us, and to give ourselves no rest till we understand what, in their private and casual conversations, they say of us.

“ This curious disposition, says the preacher, is by all means to be repressed, as the indulgence of it is both FOOLISH and UNJUST; as it not only serves to embitter your own lives by the unwelcome discoveries ye are most likely to make; but at the same time to convict your own consciences of much iniquity; since, upon reflection, ye will find that ye have, yourselves, been guilty at some unguarded hour or other, of the same malignity or flippancy towards other men.”

In these two considerations is comprised whatever can be said to discredit this vice: the *one*, you see, taken from the preacher's

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knowledge of human life ; the *other*, from his intimate acquaintance with the secret depravity and corruption of the human heart.

Permit me, then, to enlarge on these two topics ; and, by that means, to open to you more distinctly the WISDOM, and the EQUITY of that conduct, which is here recommended to us, of *not giving a solicitous attention to the frivolous and unweighed censures of other men.*

I. *Take no heed*, says the preacher, *to all words that are spoken*, LEST THOU HEAR THY SERVANT CURSE THEE. This is the FIRST reason which he assigns for his advice.

The force of it will be clearly apprehended, if we reflect (as the observing author of the text had certainly done) that nothing is more flippant, nothing more unreasonably and unaccountably petulant, than the tongue of man.

It is so little under the controul, I do not say of candour, or of good-nature, but
of

of common prudence, and of common justice, that it moves, as it were, with the slightest breath of rumour; nay, as if a tendency to speak ill of others were instinctive to it, it waits many times for no cause from without, but is prompted, as we may say, by its own restlessness and volubility to attack the characters of those who chance to be the subject of discourse. Without provocation, without malice, without so much as intentional ill-will, it echoes the voice of the present company; vibrates with the prevailing tone of conversation; or takes occasion from the slightest occurrence, from some idle conceit that strikes the fancy, from the impulse of a sudden and half-formed suggestion, that stirs within us, to exercise its activity in a careless censure of other men.

Nay, what is more to be lamented, the sagacious observer of mankind will find reason to conclude, that no zeal for our interests, no kindness for our persons, shall at all times restrain this unruly member, the tongue, from taking unwelcome freedoms

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with us. The dearest friend we have, shall at some unlucky moment be seduced by an affectation of wit, by a start of humour, by a flow of spirits, by a sudden surmise, or indisposition, by any thing, in short, to let fall such things of us, as have some degree of sharpness in them, and would give us pain, if they were officiously reported to us,

This appears to have been the sentiment of the wise preacher in the text. Avoid, says he, this impertinent curiosity, *lest thou hear thy servant curse thee*; lest the very persons that live under thy roof and are most obliged to thee, who are reasonably presumed to have the warmest concern for thy honour and interest, and on whose fidelity and gratitude the security and comfort of thy whole life more immediately depends, lest even these be found to make free with thy character. For there is a time, when even *these* may be carried to speak undutifully and disrespectfully of thee,

And

And would any man wish to make this discovery of those, who are esteemed to be, and, notwithstanding these occasional freedoms, perhaps *are*, his true servants and affectionate friends?

For think not, when this unlucky discovery is made, that the offended party will treat it with neglect, or be in a condition to consider it with those allowances, that, in reason and equity, may be required of him. No such thing: It will appear to him in the light of a heinous and unpardonable indignity: it will occasion warm resentments, and not only fill his mind with present disquiet, but most probably provoke him to severe expostulations; the usual fruit of which is, to make a deliberate and active enemy of him, who was, before, only an incautious and indiscreet friend: at the best, it will engender I know not what uneasy jealousies and black suspicions; which will mislead his judgment on many occasions; and inspire an anxious distrust, not of the faulty person himself only,

only, but of others, who stand in the same relation to him, and, perhaps, of all mankind.

These several ill effects may be supposed, as I said, to flow from the discovery : and it will be useful to set the malignity of *each* in its true and proper light.

1. *First*, then, consider that a likely, or rather infallible effect of this discovery, is, *to fire the mind with quick and passionate resentments*. And what is it to be in this state, but to lose the enjoyment of ourselves ; to have the relish of every thing, we possess, embittered by pungent reflections on the perfidy and baseness of those, with whom we live, and of whom it is our happiness to think well ; to have the repose of our lives disturbed by the most painful of all sensations, that of supposed injury from our very friends ? And for what is this wretchedness, this misery, encountered ? For the idleness of an unweighed discourse ; for something, which, if kept secret from us, had
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had been perfectly insignificant; for a discourtesy, which meant nothing and tended to nothing; for a word, which came from the tongue, rather than the heart; or, if the heart had any share in producing it, was recalled perhaps, at least forgotten, in the moment it was spoken. And can it be worth while to indulge a curiosity which leads to such torment, when the object of our inquiry is itself so frivolous, as well as the concern we have in it?

2. *Another mischief attending the gratification of this impertinent curiosity, is, That the unwelcome discoveries we make, naturally lead to peevish complaints and severe expostulations; the effect of which is, not only to continue and inflame the sense of the injury already received, but to draw fresh and greater indignities on ourselves, to push the offending party on extremes, and compell him, almost, whether he will or no, to open acts of hostility against us. The former ill treatment of us, whatever it might be, was perhaps forgotten; at least it had hitherto*

gone no further than words, and, while it was, or was supposed to be, undiscovered, there was no thought of repeating the provocation, and there was time and opportunity left for repenting of it, and for recovering a just sense of violated duty. But when the offence is understood to be no longer a secret, the discovery provokes fresh offences. Either pride puts the aggressor on justifying what he has done; or the shame of conviction, and the despair of pardon, turns indifference into hate; ready to break out into all sorts of ill offices; and the readier, because the strong resentment of so slight a matter, as a careless expression, is itself, in turn, accounted an atrocious injury. And thus a small discourtesy, which, if unnoticed, had presently died away, shall grow and spread into a rooted *ill-will*, productive of gross reciprocal hostilities, and permanent as life itself.

It is on this account that wise men have always thought it better to connive at moderate injuries, than, by an open resentment
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of them, to provoke greater : and nothing is mentioned so much to the honour of a noble Roman ^a, as that, when he had the papers of an enemy in his hands (which would certainly have discovered the disaffection of many persons towards the republic and himself) he destroyed them all, and prudently, as well as generously, resolved to know nothing of what they contained. And this conduct, which was thought so becoming a great man in public life, is unquestionably (on the same principle of prudence and magnanimity, to say nothing of higher motives) the duty and concern of every private man.

3. But, *lastly*, supposing the resentment conceived on the discovery of an ungrateful secret, should not break out into overt acts of hatred and revenge, still the matter would not be much mended. For, *it would surely breed a thousand uneasy suspicions*, which would prey on the hurt mind ; and do irreparable injury to the moral character, as well as em-

^a Pompey, who burnt the papers of Sertorius.

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bitter the whole life of him who was unhappily conscious to them.

The experience of such neglect or infidelity in those whom we had hitherto loved and trusted, and from whom we had expected a suitable return of trust and love, would infallibly sour the temper, and create a constant apprehension of future unkindness. It would efface the native candour of the mind, and bring a cloud of jealousy over it, which would darken our views of human life. It would make us cold, and gloomy, and reserved; indifferent to those who deserved best of us, and unapt for the offices of society and friendship. The more we suppressed these sentiments, the more would they fester and rankle within us; till the mind became all over tenderness and sensibility, and felt equal pain from its own groundless surmises, as from real substantial injuries. In a word, we should have no relish of conversation, no sincere enjoyment of any thing, we should only be miserable *in*, and *from* ourselves.

And

And is this a condition to be officiously courted, and sought after? Or rather, could we suffer more from the malice of our bit-terest enemy, than we are ready to do from our own anxious curiosity to pry into the infirmities of our friends?

HITHERTO I have insisted on the danger of *giving heed to all words that are spoken*, LEST THOU HEAR THY SERVANT CURSE THEE; in other words, on the FOLLY of taking pains to make a discovery, which may prove unwelcome in itself, and dreadful in the consequent evils it may derive upon us.

II. It now remains that I say one word on the INJUSTICE, and want of equity, which appears in this practice. FOR OFTENTIMES ALSO THINE OWN HEART KNOWETH, THAT THOU THYSELF, LIKEWISE, HAST CURSED OTHERS.

And as in the former case the preacher drew his remonstrance from his knowledge of the world; so in this, he reasons from his intimate knowledge of the human heart.

Let

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Let the friendliest, the best man living, explore his own conscience, and then let him tell us, or rather let him tell himself, if he can, that he has never offended in the instance here given. I suppose, on a strict inquiry, he will certainly call to mind some peevish sentiment, some negligent censure, some sharp reflection, which, at times, hath escaped him, even in regard to his *second self*, a bosom friend. Either he took something wrong, and some suspicious circumstance misled him; or, he was out of health and spirits; or, he was ruffled by some ungrateful accident; or, he had forgotten himself in an hour of levity; or a splenetic moment had surpris'd him. Some or other of these causes, he will find, had betrayed him into a sudden warmth and asperity of expression, which he is now ashamed and sorry for, and hath long since retracted and condemned.

Still further, at the very time when this infirmity overtook him, he had no purpos'd

unfriendliness, no resolved disaffection towards the person he allowed himself to be thus free with. His tongue indeed had offended, but his heart had scarce consented to the offence. The next day, the next hour, perhaps, he would gladly have done all service, possibly he would not have declined to hazard his life, for this abused friend.

I appeal, as the wise author of the text does, to yourselves, to the inmost recollection of your own thoughts, if ye do not know and feel that this which I have described hath sometimes been your own case. And what then is the inference from this self-conviction? Certainly, that ye ought in common justice, to restrain your inclination of prying into the unguarded moments of other men. If your best friends have not escaped your flippancy, where is the equity of demanding more reserve and caution towards yourself from them? Without doubt the proper rule is to suppose, and to forgive,

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these

these mutual indiscretions, which we are all ready to commit towards each other. We should lay no stress on these casual discourtesies; we should not desire to be made acquainted with them; we should dismiss them, if some officious whisperer bring the information to us, with indifference and neglect. To do otherwise is not only to vex and disquiet ourselves for trifles: It is to be unfair, uncandid, and *unjust*, in our dealings with others; it is to convict ourselves of partiality and hypocrisy, *For thine own heart knoweth, that thou thyself likewise hast done the same thing.*

Ye have now, then, before you the substance of those considerations which the text offers, for the prevention of that idle and hurtful curiosity of looking into the secret dispositions and discourses of other men. Ye see how foolish, how dangerous, how iniquitous it is, *to give heed to all words that are spoken.*

It

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It becomes a man indeed to lay a severe check and restraint on his own tongue. Far better would it be, if all men did so. But they who know themselves and others, will not much expect this degree of self-government, will not, if they be wise, be much scandalized at the want of it; since they know the observance of it is so difficult and sublime a virtue, since they know that nothing less than extraordinary wisdom can, at all times, prevent the tongue of man from running into excesses, since they are even told by an Apostle, *That if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man* ^b.

Let us then allow for what we cannot well help. And let this consideration come in aid of the others, employed in the text, to expell an inveterate folly, which prompts us to lay more stress upon words, than such frivolous and fugitive things deserve. Let us regard them, for

^b James iii. 2.

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the most part, but as the shaking of a leaf, or the murmur of the idle air : they rarely merit our notice, and attention more : or, when they do, we should find it better to indulge our *charity*, than our curiosity ; I mean, to *believe well of others*, as long as we can, rather than be at the pains of an anxious inquiry for a pretence to *think ill* of them.

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S E R M O N XVI.

Preached March 21, 1774.

ACTS xxiv. 24, 25.

After certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jew, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ. And, as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, GO THY WAY FOR THIS TIME; WHEN I HAVE A CONVENIENT SEASON, I WILL CALL FOR THEE.

THIS Felix, whose name is become so memorable in the Christian church, had been made Procurator of Judæa by the Emperor Claudius, and continued in that

government during the six or seven first years of Nero: when he was recalled to answer for his oppressive administration before the emperor; who, we are told, would have punished him, according to his deserts, but for the interposition of Pallas, at that time Nero's chief minister.

He was, indeed, in all respects a very corrupt and profligate man, as appears from the testimony of Tacitus^a and Josephus^b; from whom we learn, that he was more especially addicted to the vices of *lust and cruelty*; both which he exercised in the most audacious manner; vexing the people with all sorts of oppression, and rioting in his excesses, without restraint. Drusilla, too, is represented to us in a light, not much more favourable. For, though a Jewess, and the wife of another man, she had contracted a marriage, or rather lived in adultery with this pagan governor of Judæa; transgressing

^a Annal. xii. c. 54. Hist. v. c. 9.

^b Antiq. Jud. L. xx. c. 5.

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at once both a moral and positive law of her religion, for the sake of ascending to that honour.

One would wonder how persons of this character should have any curiosity to *hear Paul concerning the faith of Christ*. And, without doubt, they had no serious desire of information. It is likely they proposed to themselves some entertainment from questioning the prisoner; and the presence of Drusilla makes it credible that the entertainment was chiefly designed for *her*; who might be a bigot to her religion, though she scorned to live up to it; and therefore wanted, we may suppose, to insult Jesus in the person of his disciple.

However, let their purpose be what it would, such were FELIX and DRUSILLA, before whom Paul *reasoned of righteousness temperance, and a judgment to come*.

Paul was not in the number of those complaisant preachers, who take a text, in which their hearers have no concern. He had to do with persons, who bade defiance

to religion in all its forms; and his subject was well suited to the occasion. They expected an amusing tale of Jesus Christ: but the Apostle, who knew how unworthy they were of being instructed in the faith, as not yet possessing the first principles of morals, took up the matter a great deal higher; and, discoursing to them on the natural duties of justice and temperance, which they had grossly violated, and on the natural doctrine of a judgment to come, which they had never believed or respected, gave them to understand, that they had much to learn, or practice at least, before they were fit hearers of what he had further to say concerning the Christian revelation.

Being taken at this advantage, we may easily conceive their surprize and disappointment: and, as the speaker knew how to give an energy to his discourse on these interesting topics, we cannot wonder, that one or both of them should be much discomposed by it. Of Drusilla the sacred text says nothing: she was, perhaps, the more
 skilful

skilful dissembler of the two; or her rage and indignation might, for the moment, get the better of her fears: but Felix had not the address, or the fortune, to disguise his feelings; he *trembled* before this plain, intrepid speaker.

This event is instructive, indeed, as it sets before us the power of conscience over the worst of men; and, at the same time, the meanness of guilt, which, in such place and dignity, could not help shrinking at the voice of truth, though speaking by the mouth of a poor dependant prisoner. But when we have made the proper use of these reflexions, on the case of Felix, we shall find a still more instructive lesson in *the subsequent conduct of this affrighted sinner*.

When the fit of trembling came upon him, he said hastily to the preacher: *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

How striking a picture of that fatal disposition which men have to put off repentance,

tance, even under the fullest conviction of guilt; and that too, on the most frivolous pretences! What Felix should have done instantly, when his conscience was so much alarmed, he omits to do: *Go thy way for this time*: and yet, to quiet that conscience, he would not be thought to lay aside all purpose of reformation: *When I have a convenient season I will call for thee*.

With this famous example in my eye, I shall attempt to shew in the following discourse: 1. *That PROCRASTINATION is the usual support of vice*: 2. *That false reasoning, or, what we may call, the SOPHISTRY OF VICE, is the great support of procrastination*: 3. *That a FINAL IMPENITENCE is the too common effect of this pernicious confederacy.* And

I. PROCRASTINATION is the main support of vice; the favourite stratagem, by which the grand deceiver himself ensnares the souls of men, and maintains his empire over them.

There

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There are few persons so desperately wicked but they resolve, secretly at least, and in their own minds, to amend their bad lives, at some time or other. But that time is rarely the present. They have other business in hand; some scheme of interest to manage, some project of ambition to pursue, some intrigue of pleasure to accomplish; in short, some darling sin or other to gratify, before they can be at leisure to execute this intended work of reformation.

Nay, there are seasons of recollection, in which the memory of their past lives afflicts and torments them; there are hours of melancholy, or ill health, in which the necessity of repentance seems pressing and instant; there are certain moments of terror, in which the final resolution is on the point of being taken: yet still, this delusive idea of *to-morrow* steps in: the memory, the necessity, the terror, are over-ruled: the ungrateful task is, for the present, deferred; *to-morrow* laid aside, and the next day forgotten.

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This was the case of Felix in the text. When bad men are clothed with power, it is not easy for truth of any kind, especially for moral truth, to gain access to them. Yet it made its way to this potent governor, and with a force which nothing could resist. It borrowed the thunder of Paul's rhetoric to speak home and loudly to his affrighted conscience. It shook his guilty mind with the sense of his crimes, his incontinence and injustice, his riot and rapine, his lust and cruelty; and still more, with the apprehension of *a judgment to come*, armed with terror, and ready to take vengeance of his multiplied iniquities.

You expect now, that, in this agony, he should take the part, which duty and prudence, his conviction and his fears, equally recommended to him. You expect, that he should apply to his instructor, who had raised this storm, to compose it; and that, leaving his chair of state, he should spring forth and accost his prisoner, as the honest jailor at Philippi had done, on a similar occasion:

What

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What must I do to be saved^c? But, no; it was not yet convenient to put that question. His pleasures, his fortune, his ambition, might be endangered by it. It was not the moment to take this decisive step. Better to think twice of it, and dismiss the preacher *for this time*.

And is there nothing in this case which we may apply to ourselves? Is there none here, whom the free remonstrance of a friend, an unexpected sentence in a moral writer, the admonition of a preacher, and, above all, the *word of God*, hath, at any time, awakened to a lively sense of his condition? A reproof from one or other of these sometimes falls in so exactly with a man's own case, and goes so directly to the heart, that he is more than commonly disturbed and confounded by it. It flashes such conviction on the mind, and shews the sinner to himself in so just a light, that he stands aghast at the deformity of his conduct, and at the peril of it. In the agitation of this distress,

^c Acts xvi. 30.

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he half resolves to repent: nay, he strives for a moment to enforce this good resolution: when, let but that dæmon, which every sinner carries about with him, whisper the word, *to-morrow*, and his conscience revives, his fears disperse, and this precious opportunity is lost, though at the hazard of never returning any more.

Not that he permits this idle insinuation to banish all thoughts of future repentance, or to prevail with him, for the present, in its true and proper form: No; to be thus far the dupe of his own folly, would disgrace him too much, and expose his prevarication too plainly: if it pass upon him, it shall be under the mask of wisdom. He turns sophister then in his own defence, and is easily convinced, "That his conduct is not altogether absurd or unreasonable."

And thus, as I proposed to shew,

II. In the next place, this fatal procrastination, which supports vice, is itself supported by a READY AND CONVENIENT SOPHISTRY.

The case of Felix will again illustrate this second observation; and shew us the whole process of that perverted ingenuity, by which the credulous mind is made easy under its delusion.

He thought it not sufficient to say to Paul; *Go thy way for this time.* This abrupt dismissal of the preacher was to be justified, in some sort, to himself, and to those who were witnesses of his consternation. He covers it, then, with this pretence; *When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

The TIME, it seems, was not proper for his immediate conversion. To become a penitent just then; on the instant; to be surprised into a good life, had the appearance of too much facility and inconsideration. He must take a space to reflect on the grounds and reasons of what had been offered to him. He had, besides, other affairs, which pressed upon him at this moment: or, if not, to deliberate on the matter, would render his conversion more solemn and effectual.

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The PLACE, too, we may believe, was as little suited as the time to this business. “What! in a public apartment of his palace! in the presence of Drusilla, whose tenderest interests were concerned in the case, and whose delicacy required managing! before his pagan courtiers, and many, we may suppose, of his Jewish subjects, who would be equally scandalized at this precipitate conversion of their master and governor!” These, and other pretences of the like sort, without doubt, occurred to him; and on the strength of these he concludes his procrastination to be fit, and decent, and justifiable, in a good degree, on the principles of virtue and prudence.

“But why, unhappy man (if one may presume to expostulate the case with thee) why this hasty and unweighed conclusion? Could there be any time more convenient for thy conversion, or any place more suitable, if thou wert in earnest to be converted?”

Wast thou ever so prepared for this change as now? Was thy mind ever so convinced

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vinted, or thy heart so affected? Didst thou ever hear and *tremble* till this day, and wilt thou expect such a miracle a second time? Can thy bad life be reformed too soon, or can it need an after-thought to justify such reformation? Can any other business come in competition with this? and can it deserve the name of weakness and surprize to give way to the powerful workings of thy own conscience? In a doubtful case, it may be well to deliberate: but can it be a secret even to thyself, that nothing is questionable here, but thy sincerity?

For what, let me ask, is that *convenient season*, which flatters thy present irresolution? Wilt thou find such a monitor, as Paul, in thy dependants? Will thy tax-gatherers preach *righteousness* to thee, and thy Centurions, *temperance*? or, thy philosophers (if, perhaps, thou hast of these about thee, to grace thy provincial pomp) will they reason with thee, on a *judgment to come*?

But the PLACE is unfit: and thou wilt send for Paul to confer in private with thee.

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Wast thou then afraid to expose thy honour by this step? And did it seem too much to give to God and truth, the glory of thy conversion? True penitence knows nothing of these punctilios. The example had edified thy unbelieving court; and might have had its effect on the insensible Drusilla. Thy injustice and incontinence had been open to all men. Was it not fit thou shouldst atone for this scandal by as public a reformation? Yet still thy pretence is, *a convenient season!* As if the first season, that offers for renouncing a bad life, were not always the most convenient."

But I continue this address to the Roman governor too long, if you consider me as directing it to him only. Let me profess, then, that by Felix I mean every sinner at this day, who procrastinates in the affair of his salvation, and would colour that procrastination by a still more contemptible sophistry. For, let us be ingenuous. This miserable Pagan, after all, had something to say for himself. This was, probably, the
only

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only time that repentance had ever been preached to him. He still, perhaps, was acquainted with little more than the name of Jesus: for his teacher, as we have seen, insisted chiefly on the great truths of natural religion. If he then scrupled to take the benefit of this first and imperfect lecture, there is some allowance to be made for his folly. But what shall we say of those who possess every possible advantage of light and knowledge, who have grown up in the profession of Christianity, and are not now to learn either its duties or terrors? If such as these have finned themselves into the condition of Felix, and yet resist the calls of grace, the commands of the Gospel, the exhortations of its ministers, the admonitions of their own conscience, all of them concurring to press upon them an immediate repentance; if there be among us such procrastinators as these, what topics of defence are there by which they can hope to excuse, or so much as palliate, their prodigious infatuation?

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“ Shall we say for them, or will they say for themselves, that they are young and healthy? that they have time enough before them, in which to grow wise at their leisure? that they wait till the boisterous passions have been calmed by reason and experience? that they expect *a convenient season* for repentance, in declining life, and the languor of old age? or that they shall find it, as others have done, on the bed of sickness, or on the bed of death?”

I have never heard that Christians have any better reasons than these for delaying repentance: and, if they have not, though the sophistry of Felix deserved to be laid open, the respect I owe to those who now hear me, will not permit me to imagine that such sophistry as this, can want to be exposed.

It will be to better purpose to set before you,

III. In the last place, the issue of this too natural alliance between procrastination

and vice, in a FINAL IMPENITENCE; of which the case of Felix, again, affords us a striking example.

When I have a convenient season, says he to Paul, *I will call for thee.* This season came, and Paul attended; to what effect, we shall now understand.

When Felix dismissed him from his presence, he insinuated, nay perhaps thought, that he should have a disposition hereafter to profit by his religious instructions. But time and bad company quieted his fears: and a favourite vice inspired other motives for the interview, than those of religion. *For he hoped,* says the historian, *that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.*

The case, we see, is well altered. He trembled before at Paul's charge against him of rapine and extortion: he would now exercise these very vices on Paul himself.

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Such was the fruit of that *convenient season*, which was to have teemed with better things!

But this is not all: *For, after two years Portius Feslus came into Felix's room; and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*

Felix then had his preacher within call for *two whole years*: time sufficient, one would think, to afford the opportunity of many a lecture *concerning the faith of Christ*. Yet, though he communed with Paul oft, it does not appear that his conferences with him turned on this subject. What he wanted to draw from him was, not truth, but money: and, when this hope failed, he was little concerned about the rest. Nay, the impression which Paul had made upon him was so entirely effaced, that he left an innocent man *in bonds*, for the sake of *doing a pleasure to the Jews*. But he had his reason still for this unwonted courtesy. For their complaints were ready to follow him (as indeed they did) to the

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throne

throne of Cæsar; whither he went, at last, unrepentant and unreformed, to encounter, as he could, the rigors of imperial justice; just as so many others, by the like misuse of time and opportunity, expose themselves to all the terrors of divine.

Not but there is yet this advantage in the parallel on the side of *Felix*. He neglected to use the space of *two years*, which was mercifully allowed him for the season of reformation: but how many Christians omit this work, not for *two* only, but for twenty, forty years; nay, for the whole extent of a long life; and never find a *convenient season* for doing the only thing, which it greatly concerns them to do, although with the astonishing delusion of always intending it.

To conclude: We have seen that procrastination serves the ends of vice; and that vice, in return, is but too successful in pleading the cause of procrastination: leaving between them this salutary lesson to

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mankind, “ That he who seriously intends to repent to-morrow, should in all reason begin to-day; *to-day*, as the Apostle admonishes, *while it is called to-day, lest the heart, in the mean time, be hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin* ^d.”

^d Heb. iii. 13.

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Preached Dec. 19, 1773.

I JOHN V. 11.

And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life; and THIS LIFE IS IN HIS SON.

WE are indebted to the Gospel for the knowledge and hope we have of eternal life; this important doctrine having, *first*, been delivered by Jesus Christ, and *only* by him, on any proper grounds of authority. This then is the *record*, or the substance of what the Gospel *testifies* and affirms, *That God hath given to us eternal life: and this life*, adds the Apostle, *IS IN HIS SON:*
that

that is, he *procured* this blessing for us ; he is not only the teacher, but the *author* of eternal life.

This last is a distinct and very momentous consideration. Reason might seem to have some part in discovering, or at least in confirming, the doctrine itself : but the *manner* of conveying the inestimable gift of eternal life, whether *immediately* from the giver of it, or by the *mediation* of some other, this is a matter of pure revelation ; and reason hath nothing more to do in the case, than to see that the revelation is, indeed, made, and then with all humility to acquiesce in it.

Being, then, to treat this sublime subject, *the redemption of mankind through Christ*, I shall do it simply in the *terms* of scripture, or at least with a scrupulous regard to the plain and obvious *sense* of them. The text says, *eternal life is in the son of God* ; and my discourse must be merely a *scriptural comment* on this declaration.

Now,

Now, the scripture teaches, that immortality was originally, and from the beginning, the free gift of God to man, on the condition of his obeying a certain law, or command, prescribed to him : whether that command be interpreted *literally*, of not eating the fruit of the forbidden tree in paradise, as we read in the second and third chapters of Genesis ; or *allegorically*, of some other prohibition, expressed agreeably to the oriental genius, in these terms. This diversity of interpretation makes no difference in the case : whatever the test of man's disobedience was, the will of the law-giver is clearly announced : If thou art guilty of disobedience, *thou shalt surely die* ^a.

Obedience, then, had the promise of *continued* life ; the penalty threatened to disobedience, was *death* : which was only saying, that the gift freely bestowed on a certain condition (and surely what man had no right to demand, might be offered on what

^a Gen. ii. 17.

terms the giver pleased) should be withdrawn on the breach of it. The loss, indeed, was immense; but to the loser no wrong was done: and of him who recalled the free gift, conditionally bestowed, and justly forfeited, no complaint, in reason, can be made.

But to what purpose, some will ask, to give that with one hand, which was presently to be withdrawn by the other? for the best reason, no doubt, whether conceivable by us, or not. However, the sad event was certainly foreseen: and, what is more, such provision was made against it, as to infinite wisdom and goodness seemed meet.

By contemplating the gradual steps of providence, as we are able to trace them in the revelation itself, we understand, that it was in the eternal purpose of the divine governor to restore life to fallen and mortal man, as *freely* as it had been at first bestowed, and on *terms* still more advantageous to him. But *the ways of heaven are not as our ways*, nor to be regulated by our impatient wishes, or
ex-

expectations. What man, in a moment, had wantonly thrown away, he was to recover once more ; but in God's good time ; not instantly, but after a long succession of ages, and such a state of intermediate discipline and preparation, as might best serve to introduce the intended blessing with effect.

Man, then, was to be reinstated in his forfeited inheritance : and the *promise* was made, though purposely in 'obscure terms, from the moment the forfeiture was incurred. In process of time, it was less, and still less obscurely signified ; yet so as that the full discovery of what was intended, and, still more, the execution of it, was long deferred.

At length, Jesus Christ came into the world to fulfill and to declare the whole will of God on this interesting subject : and from him, and from those commissioned by him, we learn what the wisest men, and even *angels*, *had desired to look into*, and could at most discern but imperfectly through the
types

types and shadows of the patriarchal and Mo-
saic dispensations.

The great mystery, now unveiled, was briefly this : that God of his infinite goodness, had, indeed, from the foundation of the world, purposed the restoration of eternal life to his unworthy creature, man ; but that in his wisdom he saw fit to confer this unmerited blessing in a way, that should at once secure the honour of his government ; and, if any thing could secure it, the future obedience and happiness of his creature : that he would only confer this mighty privilege at the instance, as it were, and for the sake of a transcendentally divine person, his only begotten son, the second person in the glorious Trinity, as we now style him : that this divine person, of his own free will co-operating with the *eternal purpose*^b of the all-gracious Father, should descend from Heaven ; should become incarnate ; should, as man, converse with men, and instruct them by his heavenly doctrine ; should taste

^b Eph. iii. 11.

deeply

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deeply of all their sorrows and infirmities (*sin only excepted*) ; should even pour out his blood unto death, and by that blood should wash away the stain of guilt ; and, on the condition of *faith* in his name, operating, as of course it must do, by a sincere obedience to his authority, should admit us, once more, to the possession of eternal happiness ; of which, finally, we have a *lively* and certain hope, in that he who had laid down his life, had power to take it again, as was declared to all the world by his resurrection from the dead *.

In this awfully stupendous manner (at which reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded) was the Grace of God to man, at length, manifested : and thus it is, when we come a little to unfold the *record*, or testimony of the Gospel, that *God hath given to us eternal life* ; and that *this life is in his son*.

Curious men have perplexed themselves and others by inquiring into the nature of

* 1 Pet. i. 3.

this

this astonishing scheme, and have seemed half inclined not to accept so *great salvation*, till they could reconcile it to their ideas of philosophy. Hence those endless altercations concerning *merit, satisfaction, imputed sin, and vicarious punishment*; in which it is hard to say, whether more subtlety has been shewn, or more perverseness; more ingenuity, or presumption. If most of these questions were well examined, it would appear, perhaps, that they are mere verbal disputes, and as frivolous as they are contentious. But, be the difference between the parties nominal or real, this we are sure of, without taking part in the controversy, that the scriptures speak of the *death* of Christ, as a *ransom for many*^b; *the price of our redemption*^c; *a sacrifice for us*^d; *a propitiation for the sins of the whole world*^e: that they speak of Christ himself, as *dying for us*^f, as *bearing our sins*

^b Matth. xx. 28.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^d Heb. ix. 26.

^e 1 John ii. 2.

^f 1 Theff. v. 10.

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in his own body on the tree^a; as suffering for sins, the just for the unjust^b; as tasting death for every man^c; as giving himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God^d; as justifying us by his blood^e; and redeeming us by the price of it^f: with a multitude of other passages to the same purpose. Now let men use what art they will in torturing such expressions as these, they will hardly prevent our seeing what the plain doctrine of scripture is, “That it pleased God to give us eternal life only *in his son*; and in his son *only* as suffering and dying for us.”

But in this consideration the whole mystery consists; how to be fully cleared up to our reason, men may dispute, if they will; and they will dispute the rather, because the

^a 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^b 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^c Heb. ii. 9.

^d Eph. v. 2.

^e Rom. v. 9.

^f 1 Pet. i. 18, 19—I Cor. vi. 20.

subject is out of their sphere, and beyond their comprehension. Whether God *could* accept such a sacrifice for sin as the death of his own son, many have presumptuously asked. Whether he *could not* have given life to man, in another way, some have more modestly doubted: but the issue of all this arrogant or needless curiosity, is but the discovery of their own weakness, on the one hand, and the confession of this stupendous truth, on the other; That God did not see fit to bestow eternal salvation on mankind, but in his own appointed way, through Christ Jesus.

In this momentous truth, then, enough for us to know, let us humbly acquiesce, and leave to others the vanity of disputing the grounds of it.

But, though the reasons of this dispensation be inscrutable to us, the measure of its *influence*, some think, they have the means to discover. For it seems to follow from St. Paul's assertion, that, *as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive*ⁿ; and from the

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 22.

idea given us of the Redeemer, as of *the lamb slain from the foundation of the world*^o; that the benefits of Christ's death extend to all men, of all times, and are, in the proper sense of the word, *universal*. Only it is to be remembered, that, if all men have an interest in Christ, whether they know it or not, *we* who do know what our interest in him is, have infinitely the advantage of them, and are inexcusable, if we reject it.

Thus far then we go upon safe grounds, and affirm without hesitation, that *God*, through his mercies in Christ Jesus, *is the Saviour of all men*, but *especially of them that believe*^p.

Another consideration, and of the utmost moment, is yet behind. Though eternal life be now again bestowed on mankind, this gift is not one and the same thing to all, but is differently modified according to the different conduct of those to whom it is

^o Rev. xiii. 8.

^p 1 Tim. iv. 10.

given. All shall *live*; but whether to happiness, or misery, and to what degree of *either*, will depend on the use of those advantages, whether of nature or grace, which every one enjoys. Not, that any degree of eternal happiness is, or can be strictly due to any man, but that the several degrees of it will be *proportioned* to our respective moral and religious qualifications. To have done otherwise, would have been to confound the order of things, and to appoint a scheme of salvation, which must utterly extinguish all virtuous industry among men. Hence, we are told, that the righteous shall shine out in different degrees of happiness, *as one star differeth from another star in glory* ⁹.

In like manner, they who shall be found worthy, not of happiness, but misery, will be sentenced to several allotments of it, by the same equal rule.

It may seem, perhaps, that, as our best works could not *merit* eternal life in happi-

⁹ 1 Cor. xv. 41.

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ness, so our worst cannot *deserve* eternal life in misery. But let us take care how we push our inquiries into this awful subject. In rewarding obedience, the *divine goodness* is chiefly displayed; and who shall presume to set bounds to it? But, in punishing disobedience, the *divine wisdom*, of which we conceive much more imperfectly, is mainly concerned: and what examples of severity in the punishment of incorrigibly impenitent offenders, after such means as have been devised to reclaim them, and for the support of his moral government over more worlds than we have any idea of, this attribute may demand, we shall do well, with all submission and modesty, to leave unexplored.

Still, what is just, that is, what is right and fit, on the whole, will undoubtedly take place: but we *are* not, we *cannot*, be competent judges of what is fit and right in this instance. It will be safest to rely, without further inquiry, on the general declaration of him, who was not only our Redeemer,

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but shall one day be our merciful judge : *These*, says he, [that is, the wicked] *shall go away into everlasting punishment : but the righteous into life eternal* *.

What remains on this subject, is only to admonish you of those *relations*, in which we stand towards the author of our salvation, and the correspondent *duties* they impose upon us. I can but just point out these *relations* and *duties* : though they deserve to be inculcated (as, in fact, they have been, by the sacred writers) with all the force of eloquent persuasion, that words can give.

With regard to the supreme cause of all things, who is of himself only the source and principle of deity, and the original author of our salvation, God, thus understood, is graciously pleased to present himself to us in the Gospel, under the idea of THE FATHER, and to consider us in the tender relation of *sons*. We owe him, therefore, all possible filial love and reverence, and must

* Matth. xxv. 46.

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so conceive of his part in the mystery of our redemption, as to refer all the fruits of it, ultimately, to *the glory of God the Father* ^s.

In subordination to the *Father*, HE in whom we have eternal life, is our *friend* ^t, and therefore entitled to our warmest love: he is our greatest *benefactor* ^u, and therefore claims our utmost gratitude: he is our only *master* ^x, and, of course, must be followed with all observance: he is our *redeemer*, and *sole mediator between God and man* ^y; therefore he challenges an implicit, an exclusive trust and confidence from us: he is the appointed *judge* of the world ^z; therefore to be regarded with the humblest fear and veneration: lastly, he is *the only begotten Son of God* ^a,

^s Phil. ii. 11.

^t John xv. 15.

^u John xv. 1..

^x Matth. xxiii. 8.

^y Rev. v. 9. 1 Tim. ii. 5.

^z Acts x. 42.

^a John iii. 18.

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may *our Lord and our God*^b; to whom therefore we are to pay transcendant honour, so as *to honour the Son even as we honour the Father*^c.

These are some, the chief of those duties, which, as Christians, we are bound to perform towards the author of our salvation. The *relations* from which they spring, could not be discovered by the light of nature; but, when made known to us by revelation, they require as certainly, and as reasonably, the several *duties* which correspond to them, as the *relations* in which we stand to God and man, as discoverable by nature only, require their respective *duties*.

You see, then, the sphere of a Christian's duty is much enlarged beyond that of the natural man: and not in these instances only, for the gospel has made known another divine *person*, (so we are obliged to speak) *the holy spirit of God*, who stands in a distinct relation to us; and to whom, therefore, his proper and peculiar ho-

^b John xx. 28.

^c John v. 23.

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nour is due. But of this divine person in the glorious Trinity, I shall find another occasion to lay before you, at large, what the scriptures have brought to light.

For the present, it may suffice to have put you in mind of what we are taught concerning *the grace of God in his Son Jesus Christ*; to the end that, religiously observing all the duties which this revealed doctrine requires of us, we may fully correspond to the gracious intentions of the revealer, by having *our fruit unto holiness*; and *the end, everlasting life*. For *the wages of sin* (be it ever remembered) *is death*: but *eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord*^d: *To whom be all praise, thanksgiving and honour now and for evermore. Amen.*

^d Rom. vi. 22, 23.

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Preached June 12, 1774.

GAL. vi. 8.

He that soweth to the spirit, shall OF THE
SPIRIT REAP LIFE EVERLASTING.

WITHOUT staying to point out the immediate occasion of these words, or to enumerate and define the several senses of the word *spirit*, in sacred scripture, it is sufficient to my present purpose to observe, that the text affirms *a general and fundamental truth of the Gospel*, more clearly and particularly explained elsewhere. It is this: That he who in this life conducts himself accord-

according to the rules and admonitions of God's holy spirit, which the Apostle calls, *sowing to the spirit*, shall, through the influence of the same spirit, obtain, that is, in the Apostle's figurative style, *shall reap, life everlasting*.

But, what ! you will say, everlasting life is the *gift of God through Christ* : how is it then that we receive this gift at the hands of another, of *God's holy spirit* ?

To resolve this difficulty, and to open to you at the same time the Christian doctrine of grace, together with the concern which we have in it, I shall consider,

I. In what *sense* we are to understand the assertion, *That everlasting life is of the spirit*.

II. In what *way* this blessing is conferred upon us ; under which head I shall have occasion to set forth the several *offices and operations* of the holy spirit.

III. Lastly, what *returns of duty*, as corresponding to these *offices* of the spirit, and as resulting from the *relations* in which we stand towards

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towards him, are, in consequence of this revelation, reasonably required of us.

I. To understand in what *sense* the scriptures assert *everlasting life to be of the spirit*, it will be necessary to form to ourselves a distinct idea of the divine œconomy in the whole work of our redemption; which (to sum up briefly what is revealed to us) appears to have been conducted in the following manner.

God the Father, of his mere grace, purposed and *willed*^a, from all eternity, the restoration of *life* to man, after his forfeiture of it by disobedience: but he saw fit to make our *title* to this free gift depend on the death and sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ: and, lastly, to give the *actual possession* of it only through the ministration of his holy spirit.

The whole of this process is full of wonder: but there is no contradiction, or inconsistency in its several parts.

^a 2 Tim i. 9.

However, to open the œconomy of this dispensation a little more distinctly, it is to be observed, that eternal life may be taken in two senses. It may either imply *a mere state of* ENDLESS EXISTENCE; and, in this sense, it is solely and properly the gift of God through Christ: *for as in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive* ^b: Or, it may mean, what it always does mean in those passages of scripture, where it is magnified so much, *a state of* HAPPINESS, in that existence; and then only a capacity of being put into this state is procured for us by the Redeemer. But this capacity, this *grace of God*, may be *frustrated by us* ^c, may even turn against us, if we be not duly prepared to enjoy that *happiness* of which we are made capable; and such *preparation*, is the proper distinctive work of God's holy spirit.

Further, to see the necessity, the importance at least, of such preparation, we are to

^b 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^c Gal. ii. 21.

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reflect, that, by the fall of man, not only life was forfeited, but the powers of his mind were weakened. Transgression had clouded his understanding, and perverted his will. He neither saw his duty so clearly as before, nor was disposed to perform it so vigorously. And this depravation of his faculties, we easily conceive, *might*, as an original taint, be transmitted to his posterity; nay, we certainly feel that it *is* so: yet, without any imputation on the author of our being, who *might* have placed us in this disadvantageous state, if he had pleased, from the beginning; and to whom we are accountable for the right use of the advantages we have, not of those we have not. Still, the purity of God's nature might require what his wisdom has decreed, that *without belinefs no man shall see the Lord*^d, and that Jesus should be *the author of eternal salvation to those* only, who, in a higher degree than our fallen nature of itself permits,

^d Heb. xii. 14.

obey

obey him ^e. And this change in our moral condition from bad to good, from a propensity to evil to a love of righteousness, is called in scripture, *a renewing of our minds, a new creation, a new man*; in opposition to the former so different state of our minds, which is called *the old man corrupted according to the deceitful lusts* ^f.

For the *change* itself, it is represented in scripture as proceeding, not from the virtue of our own minds, but from the influence of the Holy Ghost upon them ^g: and when it has taken place in us, then, and not till then, is *our election sure*, and we are *made heirs according to the hope of eternal life* ^h.

This extraordinary provision for restoring man to the image of God, to *the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and*

^e Heb. v. 9.

^f Eph. iv. 22.

^g Tit. iii. 5.

^h Tit. iii. 7.

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*true holiness*ⁱ, is what reason could not have hoped for, but, when made known by revelation, seems to have been expedient, may be conceived to have been even necessary, and is clearly an expression of the divine goodness, which, though it fill our minds very justly with wonder, as well as gratitude, none of our natural notions contradict.

We see, then, in general, *how* the new man receives the gift of eternal life from the spirit. Let us now consider more particularly,

II. In the second place, in what *way* this new creation is carried on and perfected in us. And here we shall find all the marks of that wisdom and fitness, which are discernable in the thing itself.

For we are renewed in the spirit of our minds^k, *by the teaching of the spirit of*

ⁱ Eph. iv. 24.

^k John xvi. 13.

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*truth*¹, *through sanctification of the spirit*^m, and *comfort of the Holy Ghost*ⁿ: that is, we have a new and better turn given to our minds, by the light derived into them from the spirit; by the good thoughts and purposes which he excites in them; and by the joy and consolation with which he rewards our endeavours to profit by the assistance thus graciously afforded to us.

That we very much want these helps and encouragements, we *all* know: that we are very much indebted to them, we *Christians* believe: and that they are not the less real, because, perhaps, not distinguishable from the workings of our own minds, now that revelation assures us of the fact, we have no scruple to affirm.

To this divine spirit, then, *the spirit of the Father*^o, and *the spirit of the son*^p, as he is equally styled, because proceeding from

¹ John xvi. 13.

^m 2 Thess. ii. 13.

ⁿ Acts ix. 31.

^o Matth. x. 20.

^p Gal. iv. 6.

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both ; to this spirit, I say, *enlightening* our understandings, *purifying* our wills, and *confirming* our faith, we must impute all that is good in us, all that proficiency in *true holiness* which qualifies us for the enjoyment of heaven : and through this discipline it is, that they *who sow to the spirit*, are, in the end, enabled *of the spirit to reap everlasting life*.

These *three* characters might be further opened and distinctly considered ; and then it would appear, that all the revelations of God's will, chiefly with regard to the redemption of man, made to the patriarchs of old, to prophets under the law, to the Apostles of our Lord, nay to our Lord himself, as *the man Christ Jesus*, and all the secret illuminations of the faithful in all times, are to be regarded as so many emanations from the spirit of God, THE ENLIGHTENER : that all the gradual improvements of our virtue, all the graces which first descend upon our hearts, and then manifest themselves in every good word and work, are the production

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duction of the same spirit, in his office of SANCTIFIER: and, lastly, that all the firmness and resolution we possess under every trial in this world, all the foretaste we have of future favour and acceptance, all our joy and peace in believing, are the signs and proofs of the COMFORTER, speaking to us, and, according to our Saviour's promise, *abiding in us.*

It is very conceivable that all this diversity of operations may be justly and reasonably ascribed to the influence of the holy spirit, without supposing that our own freedom is impeded or infringed. For influence is not compulsion; and we are every day induced by others to do that which we should not have done of ourselves, without feeling or suspecting that the least violence is offered to our free-will. *A convincing truth* clearly presented to us; *a virtuous thought* incidentally suggested; *a gleam of hope or gladness*, suddenly let in upon us; all this is no more than we frequently experience in the company of wise and good men, who yet would

be much surpris'd, and would have reason to think themselves much injured, if we complain'd of any undue influence exerted by them. Yet thus it is, and thus only, that the holy spirit *constraineth us*: and the scriptures are so far from representing this constraint under the idea of force, or physical necessity, that they speak of it as the perfection of moral freedom: *Where the spirit of the Lord is, says the Apostle, there is liberty* ^P.

Having, therefore, seen in *what sense* it is affirmed that the spirit *giveth* life; and in *what way*, consistently with the free use of our faculties, he dispenses this gift, and exercises a variety of offices toward us; it remains,

III. In the last place, to see what *returns of duty*, as corresponding to the several characters of the holy spirit, and resulting from the relations in which we stand to him, are required on our part; in other words, what we are to do, before we can hope to be *trans-*

^P 2 Cor. iii. 17.

formed

formed by the renewing of our minds, under the influence of the holy spirit.

One previous indispensable condition of our obtaining that influence seems to be, that we *ASK it*, that is, put up our petitions to God for it: a consideration, which, while it shews the utility, the necessity of prayer, sufficiently accounts, I doubt, to many of us, for the little or no effect which, as we pretend and sometimes lament, this renovating power of the spirit has upon us.

This duty of prayer being supposed; with regard to the holy spirit himself, *in general*, all the reverence, honour, worship, which his divine nature exacts from us, and all the love and gratitude which his gracious concurrence with the Father and the Son, in the great work of our redemption, so eminently deserves, are to be religiously paid to him.

More *particularly*, we are to consider, that to the several characters or offices, sustained by this divine person, and exercised towards us, several duties respectively correspond; which

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indeed are obvious enough, but must just be pointed out.

1. If a ray of light break in upon us, if a new degree of knowledge be imparted to us, if we see the truth of the gospel more clearly in any respect than before we had done, we cannot mistake in ascribing this additional information or conviction (which comes very frequently we know not how, and when the general bent of our thoughts, perhaps, lies another way) to the illuminating spirit within us; and we are to see to what further purpose that illumination may serve, and how far it may go towards dissipating the darkness of our minds in other instances.

2. If we feel (as at times we all of us do) a vicious inclination checked, a virtuous purpose encouraged, a moral or a pious sentiment suggested, these secret motions are, nay, must be, from the holy spirit; and our duty is to entertain and to improve them.

3. Or, again, if we perceive our devotions to be quickened, our hopes enlivened, our faith fortified, though the present state of
our

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our temper or constitution may be instrumental in producing these effects, yet, if they go no farther than scripture warrants, and right reason allows, we shall not mistake (having the exprefs promise of our Lord and master) in ascribing these consolations of peace and joy to the *Comforter*; we may regard them as *the earnest and pledge of the spirit in our hearts*^a; and then, *our part* is so to cherish and use them, as to *go on from strength to strength*^r, till we arrive at perfection.

You see there is enough for us to do, though *the spirit strive with our spirit*^s, and in such sort that we derive the power *to will and to do*^t what we ought, ultimately from him.

I know that this, and other things, which on the authority of scripture, I have delivered on the present subject, will appear strange to natural reason. But so that scripture has

^a Eph. i. 14.

^r Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

^s Gen. vi. 3. Rom. viii. 16.

^t Phil. ii. 13.

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prepared us to expect they would do. *For the natural man, says the Apostle, receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him*^u. And to the same purpose our divine master himself, speaking of *the spirit of truth; whom, says he, the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye, addressing himself to his disciples [that is, to men, who walk by faith, and not by sight] ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

On this assurance, then, we may reasonably believe what, by reason, we cannot understand. And the substance of what we are to believe on this whole subject, is contained in a single text of St. Peter, where the *three* divine persons, yet ineffably *one* God, “*the Trinity in unity*^x,” whom we adore, and their respective offices, are accurately distinguished. For in the opening of his first epistle, he pronounces the Christians, to whom he writes, ELECT, that is, entitled to salvation,

^u 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^x Athanasian creed.

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according to the foreknowledge, or pre-determination^y, of God the Father; through the sanctification of the spirit unto obedience; and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

In these memorable words, we have a brief, yet clear epitome of our whole faith. And thus at length you see that, though eternal life be *the gift of GOD in his SON*, it is only ensured, and finally conveyed to us, by the ministry of *his HOLY SPIRIT*: to which blessed TRINITY, therefore, be all honour, and praise, and adoration now and for ever!
AMEN.

^y So the word προγνωσιν means in this place; as it likewise does in Acts ii. 23. where the sense of it is clearly explained and defined by the words, τῇ ὀρισμένη βελῇ, which introduce it. The participle προεγνωσμένῃ has the same sense in 1 Pet. i. 20.

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S E R M O N XIX.

Preached June 19, 1774.

2 COR. VII. 1.

Having therefore these promises (dearly beloved) let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God,

OUR discourses from this place turning very much, as they ought to do, on the great Christian doctrine of salvation, that is, of *eternal life*, considered as the gift of God to mortal and sinful man, through the redemption of his Son, and the sanctification of his holy spirit, it would be a strange neglect in us, if we did not take care to remind
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our hearers of the effect which that doctrine ought to have upon them.

This duty I mean now to discharge towards you: and I cannot do it more properly than by enforcing that advice which St. Paul gave the Corinthians, as the result of a long and eloquent discourse to them on the same subject. *Having THEREFORE (says he) these promises [i. e. the promise of eternal life, and of acceptance through Christ, so as to become the people of God, nay the sons of God, with other assurances of the like sort^a, interspersed in the two preceding chapters, Having these promises] let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

The inference, you see, is direct to our purpose: and common ingenuity, if nothing else, might well engage us, in return for such great and precious promises, to draw the same conclusion for ourselves. But, when we further consider that these pro-

^a Ch. v. 1. v. 18. And vi. 16. 18.

mises are conditional, and made only to those who obey the giver of them ^b, interest, as well as gratitude, will oblige us to yield that obedience so expressly required of us.

This obedience is briefly summed up in the direction; *to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*, that is, to take care, agreeably to the double obligation imposed upon us by the distinct parts of our constitution, that we consult the integrity both of our bodies and minds; and preserve them both from that defilement which each of them, according to its nature, is liable to contract in this state of moral probation.

I. With regard to the FLESH, the gross vices which defile that part of our frame, are so expressly condemned by the law of reason, as well as of the gospel, and are so repugnant to the inbred modesty of every man, especially of such as have had their natural sense of decency quickened by a good education, that but to mention them in this

^b Heb. v. 9.

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place, I would hope, is quite sufficient. If I go farther, it shall only be to remind you of one thing, which I have explained at large on a former occasion^c, That Christianity hath added unspeakably to the worth and dignity of the human body, by considering it no longer as the store-house of impure lusts, but as the habitation, the *temple* of the living God, to whose sole use it is now dedicated^d.

The turpitude, the dishonour, the impiety of defecrating this sanctuary of the holy spirit by sordid, carnal excesses, is then apparent to every Christian.

But the vices of the SPIRIT do not always strike the attention so forcibly; though they be as real as those of the body, and sometimes more fatal. The reason is, that the spiritual part of man does not lie so open to observation as the corporeal. The mind is not easily made an object to itself; and,

^c See Sermon XIII. in this volume.

^d 2 Cor. vi. 16. 1 Cor. iii. 16.

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when it is, we have a strange power of seeing it in a false light, and of overlooking its blemishes, or of even mistaking them for beauties. In short, *the filthiness of the spirit* may be long unobserved, and therefore *uncleansed*; if it be not pointed out to us by some friendly monitor, who is more practised in this mental inspection than ourselves, or has less interest, however, to conceal our depravity from us.

Permit me, then, to assume the charitable office of holding up to your view these *spiritual vices*; not all of every sort (for that would be endless) but the chief of those which tend more immediately to defeat the gracious *promises* made to us in the gospel.

II. I say nothing of that corruption which direct and positive infidelity strikes through the soul, whether it be the infidelity of Atheism, or what is called Deism; because, on men who espouse either of these systems, the promises of the gospel take no hold; and because it ought not, cannot be
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supposed, that men of no religion, or of no faith, appear in these Christian assemblies. You will think me better employed in pointing out such corruptions, as may not improbably adhere even to believers; though concealed from their own observation, it may be, or disguised, at least, to themselves under various pretences.

I. The first of these that I shall mention, is a sort of HALF-BELIEF, which floats in the mind, and, though it do not altogether renounce the hopes of the Gospel, is far from reposing a firm trust in them. Many professed believers have, I doubt, this infirmity, this taint of infidelity, still cleaving to them. They think Christianity an useful institution; nay, they think it not destitute of all divine authority. But then they reduce this authority to just nothing, by allowing themselves to put it as low as they can—by taking great liberties in explaining both its doctrines and precepts—by admitting such parts of this revelation, as they believe themselves able to make out to the satisfaction of their

own minds, and by rejecting, at least by questioning in some sort, whatever they cannot perfectly understand—by treating some things as incredible, others, as impracticable; one part of their religion as too mysterious, and another as too severe. “They believe, they say, what they can: but, after all, there are many strange things in this religion; and the evidence for the truth of them is not so controuling, but that there is room for some degree of doubt and hesitation.”

All this, perhaps, they do not say to others; nay, not to themselves, except when they are pressed by some conclusion from scripture, which either their prejudices, or their passions, make them very unwilling to admit; and then they take leave to be as sceptical as the occasion requires.

But now from such a faith as this, no wholesome or permanent fruits can be expected. It has no root in them; and the *promises*, that should feed and nourish it, have but a faint and feeble effect; just enough, perhaps,

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perhaps, to keep their hopes from dying outright, but much too little to push them into any vigorous efforts of obedience.

The way for such to *cleanse themselves* from this pollution of spirit (for to the several defects, the proper remedy in each case shall, as we go along, be subjoined) is, once for all, to examine the foundations of their religion; and, if they find them, on the whole, solid and satisfactory, to rely upon them thenceforth with a confidence entire and unshaken. They should reflect, that every revealed doctrine, of whatever sort, as standing on the same ground of infallible truth, is equally to be admitted. There is no compromising matters with their divine master: they must either quit his service, or follow him without reserve. And this, upon the whole, they will find to be the manly and the reasonable part for them to take. To halt between two opinions so repugnant to each other, to embrace so interesting a thing as religion by halves, is

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neither for the credit of their courage, nor of their understanding.

Having then the *promise* of eternal life, let them reckon upon that promise, like men who know its value, and do not mistrust on what ground it stands. If they are Christians at all, they cannot justify it even to themselves not to be Christians in good earnest. And thus will they happily escape the disgrace of an *irresolved and indolent faith*; which involves them in much of the guilt, and in almost all the mischiefs, of infidelity. But,

2. There are those who have not a doubt about the truth of Christianity, and yet, through a certain LEVITY OF MIND, derive but little benefit from their conviction.

This spiritual vice is, perhaps, the commonest of all others; and, though it seems to have something prodigious in it, is easily accounted for from the intoxication of health, youth, and high spirits; from the restless pursuit of pleasure, which occupies one part of the world, and of business, which dis-

tracts

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tracts another; from a too-passionate love of society in many; from feverish habits of dissipation in more; and from a fatal impatience of solitude and recollection in almost all.

But, by whichsoever of these causes the vice of inconsideration, we have now before us, is produced and nourished, it is of the most malignant sort, and being ready to branch out into many others, should be resolutely checked and suppressed. Though there be nothing directly criminal in the pursuit which takes us from ourselves, it is always dangerous to lose sight of what we are, and whither we are going, and may be fatal. For, not to believe, and not to call to mind what we believe, is nearly the same thing. And when a temptation meets us thus unprepared, it wants no assistance from infidelity, but is secure of prevailing by its own strength, under cover of our inattention.

Such, I doubt not, is the sad experience of thousands, every day; while yet the mis-

judging world, that part of it, especially, whose interest it is to suppose that all men are equally destitute of religious principles, rashly conclude that there is no faith, where there is so much folly. "These hypocrites, say they, are convicted of the same unbelief, which they perpetually object to us:" Alas, no: they are convicted of inconstancy, only.

Not that this consideration excuses their guilt: it even aggravates and inflames it. For, when *one thing*, only, is needful, and they know it to be so, not to retain a practical, an habitual sense of it, but to suffer every trifle to mislead, every sudden gust of passion to drive them from *the hope* and end of *their calling*, argues an extreme depravity of mind, and deserves a harsher name than we commonly give to this conduct.

However, soften it to ourselves, as we will, under any fashionable denomination, the *spirit* must be cured of this vice, or the *promises* of the Gospel are lost upon us. And the proper remedy is but one. We must
 resolve,

resolve, at all events, to acquire the contrary habit of consideration. We must meditate much and often on what we believe: we must force our minds to dwell upon it: we must converse more with ourselves, how bad company soever we take that to be, and less with the world, which so easily dissipates our thoughts, and oversets our best resolutions.

If we would but every day set apart a small portion of our time, were it but a few minutes, to supplicate the grace of God, and to say seriously to 'ourselves; *I believe the promises, and I acknowledge the authority of the gospel*; (and less than this, who can think excusable in any man, whatever his condition of life may be, that calls himself a Christian?) This short and easy discipline, regularly pursued, and, on no pretence whatever, intermitted, would presently effect the cure we so much want, and restore the sickly mind to its health and vigour.

3. Still, there may be a general belief in the promises of the Gospel, and a good degree of attention to them, and yet men may

be but little impressed by what they thus believe and consider. This affection of the mind is sometimes experienced, but has hardly acquired a distinct name. Let us call it, if you please, a DEADNESS, or INSENSIBILITY OF HEART; which, so far as it proceeds from natural constitution, is a misfortune only; but, when cherished or even neglected by us, it becomes a fault.

The danger of it lies here, lest by seeing with indifference the most important objects of our hopes and fears, we come by degrees to neglect or overlook them; to question, perhaps, the reality of them; or, to lose, however, the benefit which even a calm view of these objects, when frequently set before the mind, must needs convey to us.

The rule in this case plainly is, To prescribe to ourselves such a regimen as is proper to correct this spiritual lethargy: that is, to stimulate the sluggish mind by the most poignant reflexions; to bring the objects of our faith, as near and close to us as we can; to paint them in the liveliest colours of the
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imagination, which, when touched itself, easily sets fire to the affections; and, above all, to keep our eye intently and steadily upon them.

We may see the utility of this regimen, in a case which is familiar to every body.

When we look forward to the end of life, it appears at a vast distance. The many, or the few years, that lie before us, take up a great deal of room in the mind, and present the idea of a long, and almost interminable duration. Hence the fatal security in which we most of us live, as conceiving that, when so much time is on our hands, we need not be solicitous to make the most of it.

But that all this is a mere delusion, we may see by looking back on the time that is already elapsed. We have lived in this world, twenty, forty, it may be, many more years: yet, in reflecting on this space, we find it just nothing: the several parts of it run together in the mind, and the first moment of our existence seems almost to

touch upon the present. Now, by anticipating this experience, and applying it to the remaining period of our lives, we may satisfy ourselves, that the years to come will pass away as rapidly, and, when gone, will appear as inconsiderable as the past; and the effect of this anticipation must be, to convince us, that no part of this brief term is to be trifled with, or unimproved.

Then, again, we have the power of imaging to ourselves, in a very lively manner, the circumstances in which death surprises very many thoughtless persons every day; and what we should feel in their situation.

Lay then these two things together; make *the shortness of life*, and *the terrors of an unprepared death*, the frequent object of your meditation; and see if the most callous mind will not presently be much affected by them.

4. The fourth and last vice of the spirit, which I have time to mention to you, is rather, perhaps, to be accounted a complication

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tion of vices. But what I mean is that unhappy turn of mind which prompts many persons to elude the effects of faith, reflexion, and even a lively sense, in matters of religion, by certain tricks of SOPHISTRY, which they practise on themselves. They believe, and they would gladly obtain, the promises of the gospel, but repentance, they suppose, will supply the place of uniform obedience: they will repent, but not yet; there is time enough, and fitter for that purpose, when passion cools, and the heat of life is over, or, they fancy to themselves an inexhaustible fund of goodness in their religion; the terms of it may not be rigidly insisted upon; the promises may not be so conditional as they seem to be; and the threats, without doubt, will not be punctually executed. At the worst, there is no need to despair of mercy, considering the frailty of man, and the infinite merits of the Redeemer.

Such reasonings as these argue a depraved mind, and tend, further, to deprave it. But your good sense prevents me in the confutation

tion of them. I would only observe, that this vice is, as I said, a complicated one : for, together with the unfairness and disingenuity (which belongs to all sophistry, as such) we have here united (what is too common in religious sophistry) a great deal of unwarrantable presumption.

The remedy in the case, is, To cultivate in ourselves a modest and ingenuous love of truth ; an awful reverence of the revealed word, and that simplicity of heart, which excludes all artifice and refinement.

From these so pernicious vices of the spirit, then, that is, from a *fluctuating faith*, an *inconsiderate levity*, an *inapprehensive deadness of heart*, and a *perverse sophistical abuse of the understanding*, let us emancipate ourselves by a firm, attentive, vigorous, and ingenuous dependance on the promises of the gospel ; from these defilements, I say, in particular (having shaken off the other more sordid corruptions of the *flesh and spirit*) let us anxiously *cleanse* our minds, with the view of *perfect-*

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ing holiness, as the text admonishes, IN THE FEAR OF GOD.

This last clause is by no means an insignificant one ; as ye will see by recollecting, that the true temper of a Christian is, hope mixed with fear ; *hope*, to animate his courage, and *fear*, to quicken his attention. For, unless this principle of fear, not a servile, but filial fear, inform the soul and invigorate its functions, we shall be far from PERFECTING HOLINESS ; we shall at best exhibit in our lives but some broken, detached, incoherent parcels of it. A steady, uniform piety, such as begets that *hope, which maketh not ashamed*^e, is only kept up by a constant watchfulness and circumspection ; which our probationary state plainly demands, and which nothing but *the fear of God* effectually secures.

^e ἡ δὲ ἐλπίς ἔκ τῆς φοβῆς. Rom. v. 5.

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S E R M O N XX.

Preached April 28, 1776.

I TIM. iii. 16.

*Without controversy great is the mystery of
godliness: God was manifest in the flesh;
justified in the spirit; seen of Angels; preach-
ed to the Gentiles; believed on in the world;
received up into glory.*

THE inspired writers, sometimes, di-
late on the articles of the Christian
religion; pursue them separately, and at
length, for the fuller and more distinct in-
formation of the faithful. Sometimes, again,
they give them to us, as it were, in clusters:
they accumulate their awful doctrines and
dis-

discoveries, to strike and astonish the mind with their united force.

This *last* is the method of the text, which I shall a little open and explain; but so as to conform myself to the Apostle's purpose in giving a brief collective view of Christianity, that, the whole of it being seen together, we may be the more sensibly affected by it.

1. This *great mystery of godliness* opens with—GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.

When the scheme of man's redemption was laid, it was not thought fit that an Apostle, a prophet, a man like ourselves, no nor an Angel or Archangel, should be the instrument of it; but that the *word of God*, the *Son of God*, nay *God* himself (as he is here and elsewhere ^f called) should take this momentous office upon him: that heaven should stoop to earth, and that the divine

^f For which reason it is not necessary for me to enter into the controversy, that divides the critics, concerning the authentic reading of this part of the text.

nature

nature should condescend to leave the mansions of glory, inshrine itself in a fleshly tabernacle, should be *made man*, should *dwell among us*, and *die for us*.

If you ask, why may not a man, or angel, have sufficed to execute this purpose of man's salvation; or, if only this divine person was equal to it, why he did not rather assume a glorified, than our mortal body; why it was necessary for him to inherit all our infirmities (sin only excepted,) and yet be conceived, in so extraordinary a manner, of the holy spirit; nay, and why he should be so conceived and born of a *virgin* (a miracle of that peculiar sort as scarce seems capable of proof, and, in fact, is only proved indirectly by the subsequent life and character and history of this divine person): If you ask these, and a hundred other such questions, I answer readily and frankly, *I know not*. But then consider, that *my* ignorance, that is, any man's ignorance, of the reasons why these things were done, is

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no argument, not so much as a presumption against there being reasons, nay, and the best reasons, for so mysterious a dispensation. Consider, too, that these mysteries no way contradict any clear principle of your own reason : all that appears is, that you should not have expected, previously to the revelation of it, such a design to be formed ; and that, now it is revealed, you do not understand why it was so conducted. But we are just in the same state of ignorance, with regard to almost every part of the divine conduct. This world, so unquestionably the work of infinite wisdom and goodness, is not, in numberless respects, what we should expect it to have been : of many parts we see not the use and end ; in some, there is the appearance of deformity ; in others, of mischief ; in all, when attentively considered, of something above, or beside, our apprehension.

Such then being the case of the natural world, why may not the moral have its depths and difficulties ? You see God in the creation :

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creation : why not in redemption ? In the former, he condescends, according to our best philosophy, to manifest himself in the meanest reptile, all whose instincts he immediately prompts, and whose movements he directs and governs : why then might he not manifest himself in man, though in another manner, and by an union with him still more close and intimate ?

But I pursue these questions no farther. It is enough that, admitting the fact, on the faith of the revelation itself, we see a wonderful goodness and condescension in this whole procedure ; that we understand the importance of having such a saviour and guide and example of life, as *God manifest in the flesh* ; that we are led to conceive, with astonishment, of the dignity of man, for whose sake the Godhead assumed our nature, and, at the same time, with consternation, of the guilt of man, for the atonement of which this assumption, with all its consequences, became necessary.

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God manifest in the flesh, is then the *first* chapter of this mysterious book; and yet, as mysterious as it is, full of the clearest and most momentous instruction.

2. The *second* is, that this wonderfully compounded person was JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT; that is, *by*, or *through* the spirit: another mystery, which, however, acquaints us with this fact, that a third divine person ministered in the great work of our redemption.

And his ministry was seen in directing the ancient prophets to foretell the Redeemer's coming^a; in accomplishing his miraculous conception^b; in assisting at his baptism^c; in conducting him through his temptation^d; in giving him the power to cast out devils, which is expressly said to be *by the spirit of God*^e; in raising him from the dead, by

^a 2 Pet. i. 21.

^b Matth. i. 18.

^c Matth. iii. 16.

^d Matth. iv. 1.

^e Matth. xii. 28.

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which

which event he was *declared the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness*^f; in descending on his disciples on the day of Pentecost^g; in bestowing diversities of miraculous gifts^h upon them, for the confirmation of his doctrine, and the propagation of it through the world; and lastly, in sanctifying and illuminating the faithful of all times and placesⁱ.

In all these ways (and if there be any other) Jesus was *justified*, that is, his commission was authenticated by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Here, again, many curious questions may be asked: but what we clearly learn is, the awful relation we bear to the Holy Ghost, as co-operating in the scheme of man's redemption; and the infinite dignity of that scheme itself, the execution of which required the agency of that transcendentally divine person.

^f Rom. i. 4. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^g Acts ii. 4.

^h 1 Cor. xii. 11.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 11. John xv. 26.

Hitherto the mystery of godliness has been doubly mysterious, being wrapped up in the incomprehensible essence of the Deity. It now stoops, as it were, through this cloud of glory, and gives itself to be somewhat distinctly apprehended by us,

3. In the *next* view we have of the Redeemer, as being SEEN OF ANGELS.

We have some grounds from analogy to conclude, that, as there is a scale of beings below us, there is also one above us: at least, the conclusion has been pretty generally drawn; and the belief almost universal of such a scale ascending from us to God, though the uppermost round of it still be at an infinite distance from his throne. But the direct, indeed the only solid proof of its existence, is the revealed word, which speaks of *Angels* and *Archangels*, nay *myriads* ^k of them, disposed into different ranks, and rising above each other in a wonderful harmony and proportion.

^k Heb. xii. 22.

Such is the idea which scripture gives us of the invisible world. Now, to raise our minds to some just apprehension of the great scheme of our redemption, it represents that world, as being put in motion by that scheme, as attentive and *earnest to look into it*¹: and, to exalt our conceptions of the Redeemer himself, it speaks of that world as being in subjection to him; of all its inhabitants, the highest in place and dignity, as serving in his retinue, and paying homage to his person^m.

They accordingly ministered to him in this capacity, when they celebrated his birth in the fields of Bethlehemⁿ; when they took part with him in his triumphs over the adversary in the desert^o; when they flew to strengthen him in his last agonies^p; when they attended, in their robes of state,

¹ 1 Pet. i. 10, 11, 12.

^m Heb. i. 6.

ⁿ Luke ii. 13.

^o Matth. iv. 11.

^p Luke xxii. 43.

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to grace his resurrection^q; and when they ranked themselves, with all observance, about him, as he went up into heaven^r.

Of the angels, then, he was seen, on all these, and doubtless other, occasions. But how was he seen? With love and wonder unspeakable, when they saw their Lord and master thus humbling himself for the sake of man; when they contemplated this bright effulgence of the deity, the express image of his person^s, veiling all his glories in flesh, and,

—low-rooft beneath the skies,
as our great poet sublimely represents his humiliation^t.

Still the *mystery* continues, though it now submits itself to the scrutiny of our senses; for it follows,

4. That he was PREACHED TO THE GEN-
TILES.

^q Matth. xxviii, 3. Luke xxiv. 4. *ἐν ἰερουσολυμοῖς*
ἀπαγγέλλεται.

^r Acts i. 10.

^s Heb. i. 3.

^t Milton.

To enter into the full meaning of this clause, we are to reflect, That, when the nations of the earth had so prodigiously corrupted themselves as to lose the memory of the true religion, and to give themselves over to the most abominable impieties, it pleased God to select one faithful family from the rest of the degenerate world, and in due time to advance it into a numerous people; which he vouchsafed to take into a near relation to himself, and, by a singular policy, to preserve distinct and separate from the surrounding tribes of Idolaters. Henceforth, the Jews (for of that people I speak) considered themselves as the sole favourites of heaven (as they were, indeed, the sole worshippers of the true God), and all the heathen as the outcasts of its providence.

This notion, in process of time, became so rooted in them, that, when Jesus now appeared in Judea, they were ready to engross all his favours to themselves, and thought it strange and incredible, that any part of them should be conferred on the reprobate

probate heathen. So that he himself was obliged to proceed with much caution in opening the extent of his commission : and St. Paul everywhere speaks of the design to save the Gentiles as the profoundest mystery, as that *which had been kept secret since the world began* ^u.

In the mean time, the mercy of God had much larger views, and sent the Messiah to be *the saviour of ALL men, especially of them*, out of every nation, *that believe* ^x.

But this mercy, so *mysterious* to the Jews, could not be much less so to the Gentiles, who must feel how disproportioned the blessing was to any deserts of man ; and who saw how enormous and how general that corruption was, which in all likelihood must exclude them from it. Thus it might reasonably be matter of *silent wonder* ^y, to both parties, to hear *Christ preached to the Gen-*

^u Rom. xvi. 25.

^x 1 Tim. iv. 10.

^y Acts xi. 18. ἡσύχασαν,

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tiles: only, this *latter* (of which party we ourselves are) might say with a peculiar exultation, what the Jews, even in *glorifying* the author of it, were not, without some reluctance, brought to acknowledge; *Then bath God, also, to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

And if the surprize be deservedly great to hear Christ *preached to the Gentiles*, it must in all reason grow upon us to find,

5. In the succeeding link of this *mysterious* chain, that he was even BELIEVED ON IN THE WORLD; that is, in the world both of Jews and Gentiles; in the former, to a certain extent; and, in the latter, to one which, though not universal, is truly astonishing.

Of the Jews it is affirmed, that *multitudes* ² of them believed; and what especially redounds to their honour and to our benefit, is, that out of the Jewish believers were taken those favoured servants of God, that

² Acts v. 14

opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, and became his instruments in conveying the light of the Gospel to all generations. And, considering the inveterate prejudices of that people, such a measure of faith, and such effects of it, could not well have been expected from that quarter.

But then, for the Gentiles, it is astonishing to observe how quick and how general their conversion to the faith was: so that all men seemed to *press*^a into the kingdom of God, and, as it were, to *take it by violence*^b. For, within forty years from the death of Christ, the sound of the Gospel *had gone out into all lands*^c; and, in less than three centuries from that event, the empire itself, that is, all the civilized part of the earth, became Christian: and this, in spite of every obstruction, which the lusts of men, operating with all their force, and confederated toge-

^a Luke xvi. 16.

^b Matth. xi. 12.

^c Ps. xix, 4. Matth. xxiv. 14.

ther,

ther, could throw in the way of the new religion.

So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed^d ! and it still prevails : not in all the world to that degree in which it one day will, and, in some parts of it, much below that degree in which it once flourished ; but to a certain degree everywhere, notwithstanding what time and superstition and barbarism have done to oppress it ; and (which should take your attention most) in all the learned and enlightened parts of the world, universally, and in those, with the greatest effect, which are most enlightened : an evident proof, that reason is congenial with faith ; and that nothing but ignorance, corrupted by vice, can hold out against the cross of Jesus.

Yet this power of the cross must be thought prodigious ; since its pretensions are so high, and its doctrine so pure, that, in a world overgrown with presumption and vice,

^d Acts xix. 20.

it could never have made its way to so much consideration, if the hand of God had not been with it.

Such is the mystery of Christ *believed on in the world!*

But now the Apostle, who had digressed a little from his main subject, or rather had anticipated some part of it, returns, from the effects which Christianity was to have on the world, to the person of its divine author; who, as it follows in the

6. *Sixth*, and last clause of this panegyrick, WAS RECEIVED UP INTO GLORY.

And this circumstance was proper to shut up so stupendous a scene. It opened with a view of *God manifest in the flesh*, degraded, eclipsed, obscured by this material vestment; yet, emerging out of its dark shade through the countenance of *the spirit*, and by the ministry of *angels*; then shining out in the face of the *Gentiles*, and gradually ascending to his meridian height in the conversion of the whole *world*. Yet was this prize of glory to be won by a long and painful conflict

flit with dangers, sufferings, and death ; in regard to which last enemy (the most alarming of all) the Apostle affirms, that *it was not possible for so divine a person to be holden of it*^e. It follows, therefore, naturally and properly (to vindicate the Redeemer's honour, and to replace him in that celestial state, from which he had descended), that, in his own person, he triumphed over hell and the grave, and went up visibly into heaven ; there to sit down at the right hand of the Father, till, his great mediatorial scheme being accomplished, he himself shall voluntarily quit the distinction of his name and place, and GOD SHALL BE ALL IN ALL^f.

On this brief comment on the text, thus far unfolded to you, I have but one reflexion to make. Ye will not derive from it a clearer insight into the reasons of all the wonders presented to you : for I intended only to lay before you those wonders themselves ; not to account to you for them : but,

^e Acts ii. 24.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 28.

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if ye feel yourselves touched with a view of these things ; if ye find your hearts impressed with an awful sense of your divine religion, and *nourished* ^z in the faith of it, then will ye be in a way to reap that fruit from this discourse, which is better than all wisdom and all knowledge ; the fruit of HOLINESS, in this short but unspeakably momentous stage of your existence ; and of HAPPINESS without measure, and without end, in the kingdom of glory.

^z 1 Tim. iv. 6. ἐντρέφόμενος τοῖς λόγοις τῆς πίστεως, καὶ τῆς καλῆς διδασκαλίας.

THE END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

if we feel ourselves touched with a view of
these things, it is your hearts impelled
with an awful sense of your divine call-
ing, and we are in the faith of it, then
will we be in a way to reap that fruit from
this discourse, is better than all else
down and all knowledge; the fruit of knowl-
edge is the fruit of righteousness; and to
reap the fruit of righteousness, and to
reap the fruit of glory, and without
end, in the kingdom of glory.

CMC

MVSEVM

BRITANNICVM

